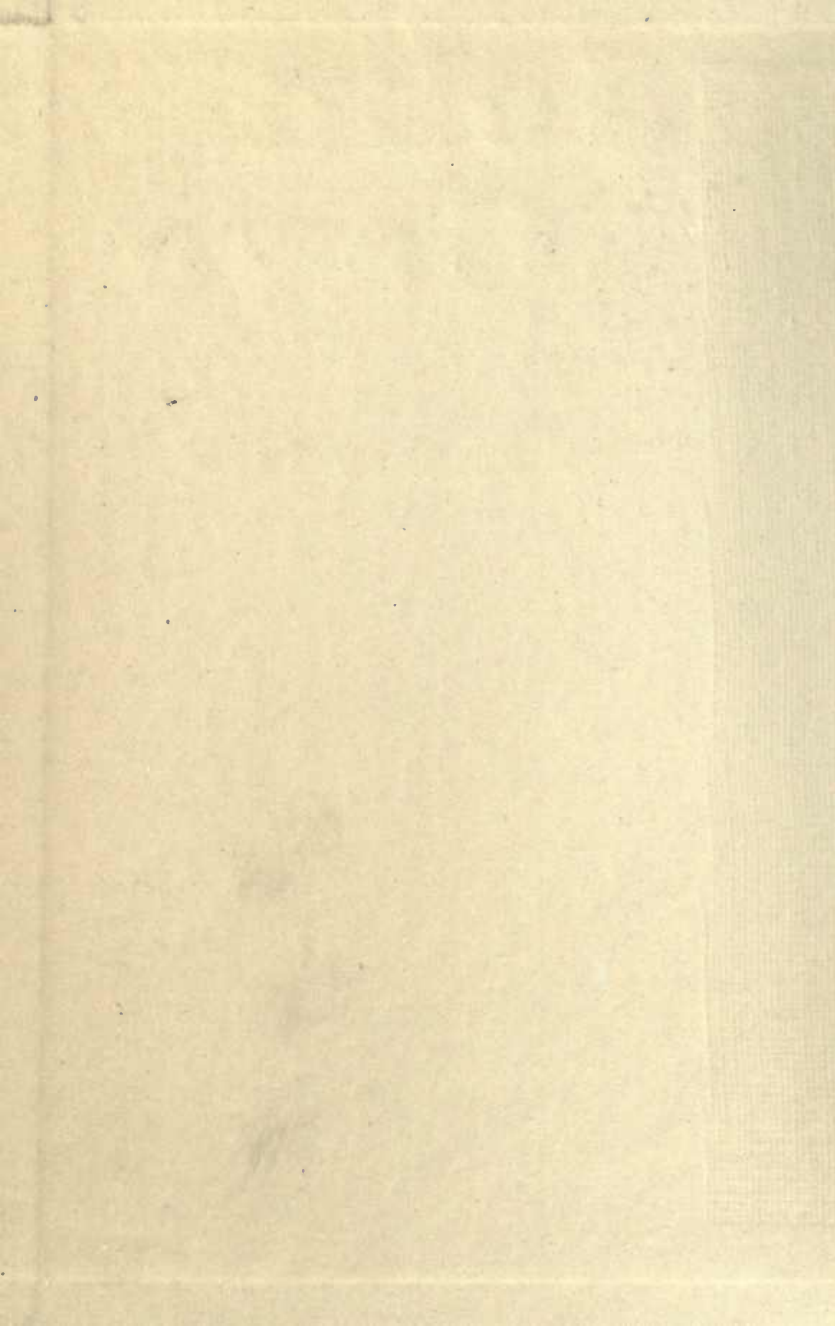


John Cave

By
W. B. TRITES



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JOHN CAVE

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BOOK I

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JOHN CAVE

CHAPTER I

HAVING, through drunkenness, at the age of twenty-four, lost his place as a reporter on one of the newspapers of Chicago, John Cave returned to the East.

On a cold and starry evening in November he arrived. His luggage a station attendant piled on the roof of a hansom, and the driver drove him to our most fashionable hotel, to our small, red-brick hotel down town.

At great expense engaging there a bedroom with a bath, he bathed and put on fresh clothes that one of the hotel valets had unpacked and pressed for him. Then he counted, thoughtfully, his money. There was a lot of it. He smiled.

He lighted a cigarette, and leaned his elbow on the white mantel of the bedroom, crossing his feet. He would not, he told himself, look for work for two or three days: there was no need: and from his lips the smoke shot forward in a straight, thin line until, its momentum lost, it floated in the air before

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him, a little, swirling cloud. He saw in the smoke the life of the theatres and cafés that he insatiably loved . . . and he smiled because he was young, because his cold bath and careful toilet had given him a sense of exquisite freshness and purity and strength, and because he expected much amusement to-night from a participation in the gaieties of our venerable city.

In the mood of a huntsman, his money being, as it were, his fowling piece, he descended to the palm-room of the restaurant, a room pleasant with the music of violins and flutes; and choosing a little table in a corner, he began to dine with a good appetite. He had finished his oysters and was awaiting the soup when . . .

She entered gaily. Her beautiful eyes, sweeping the room, met his almost at once. And they lingered in his, as, attended by obsequious waiters, she advanced with gallant and joyous air. A man of middle age was with her, but she gave to Cave the friendliest look as she sat down.

He was flattered, for she appeared to be the daughter of a rich and distinguished house; but at the same time, too, he was alarmed. Perhaps she thought him an acquaintance: it seemed incredible that a girl like her should flirt. Nevertheless he resolved, by hook or by crook, to know her. It would be horrible, though, if she should rebuff him

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before the people in the palm-room. He grew nervous at the thought.

Champagne was served with her dinner, and she drank to him prettily. Afterwards she made for his benefit a grimace of amused and tolerant disdain at her companion. He now had no more fear.

His only care was how best to approach her, and to the waiter, when his fish was brought, he said:

"Can you tell me who that young girl is over there?"

The grave waiter answered:

"No, sir. But I'll try to find out for you. I'll ask some of the other waiters."

And he went here and there solemnly, whispering to this man and to that. The one interrogated, without interrupting his work, would cast at the young girl a swift, cautious glance and shake his head. Discretion, even dignity, marked the conduct of this investigation.

"No one knows her, sir. She has never been here before," the waiter said on his return.

Then John perceived he must be bold, or otherwise he might never see the young girl again, and the memory of having lost her friendship through cowardice would in the future grieve him. So the next time he met her smile he formed with his lips the question, "May I come over?" and she answered, "Yes."

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Thereupon he turned pale, and rose and hastened to her table with a terror-stricken look.

"How do you do? How do you do? I haven't seen you for a long time, have I?" he said in a tremulous voice.

"Not for a long time," said the girl, and her slim hand gave to his a pressure swift, delicate, enigmatic. "Your name is Wilson, isn't it?" she said.

"Yes, my name is Wilson," he agreed.

She introduced him to her companion.

The man of middle age had a diamond button in the bosom of his coloured shirt, and with his dinner he was drinking *café-au-lait* out of a big cup. Cave shook him by the hand.

"Sit down here with us a little while," said the girl.

"Yes, pull up a chair," urged her companion.

"Thank you," said John, and the waiter brought his coffee over.

"Now you must have a glass of champagne." Her elbows on the table, her chin upon her interlocked white fingers, the young girl gave him the invitation with an arch and tender smile.

But he hesitated, for on his discharge from the Western newspaper he had resolved never to drink again.

"No . . . I don't believe, thanks. . . . The fact

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is, I . . . Oh, yes, I will, too." He laughed a weak laugh, and sipped the icy wine.

The others also laughed.

"You had sworn off, hadn't you?" murmured the girl, her voice a little sad, a little reproachful.

"Yes, but what of that?" said he. "I am always swearing off."

She murmured: "So am I."

"I never swore off in my life," the man interjected, in a superior tone.

They began to tell of the harm that alcoholic drinks had done to them and to persons whom they knew. The dinner ended; they ordered another bottle of champagne; their conversation became brilliant, humorous, profound. The violins and flutes made a soft and pleasant music. The walls, lemon-coloured, shone like gold behind the green of the palms. The people about them looked opulent and distinguished, and they also, they felt, had an opulent and distinguished look.

But the young girl became too tender in her manner towards Cave, and for long intervals forgot the man of middle age. He tried to make it seem that he did not mind this, but he could not shake off the gloom that settled — settled like cold rain — upon him, and finally his animated face changed to a stony and forbidding mask.

He began to look repeatedly at a thick watch.

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"It's time to be going," he announced.

"I don't want to go yet," said the girl.

"Yes. Get ready if you're coming with me. I've got to make the nine-fifteen train."

"And I'll be left alone in my rooms all the rest of the evening! I think I'll stay here. I think I'll stay with Mr. . . . Mr. Brown."

She smiled a delicate, tormenting smile.

"Mr. who?" said her companion.

"Oh, never mind!" She frowned.

"Well, you said his name was Wilson."

"Wilson's my name; you have forgotten," John interposed.

"Come on," said the man. He had risen now. "Come on if you're coming."

The young girl looked at Cave. "I want some more champagne," she said.

"Come on; you've had enough."

She addressed herself to Cave: "If I stay, will you get me some more champagne?"

"Yes, indeed," he answered.

"Then I'll stay."

The man withdrew. He did not say good-bye, nor did he, as it afterwards developed, pay his bill. John paid it. It was huge.

When they were left alone, the young man and the girl, their elbows on the table, their chins on

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their hands, looked at one another, admiring one another with their clear, frank, youthful eyes.

"What is your name?" she said.

"John Cave. What is yours?"

"Prudence."

"That is an interesting name. It sounds like a little country girl's name."

"I am a country girl. My people all live in the country."

"And what are you doing here in the city alone?"

"Father thinks I'm a manicurist. . . . I was a manicurist. But I gave it up. Father is down on me. He thinks I'm bad."

"I'm sure Prudence isn't bad," said John, and he laughed heartily. He lifted his glass. "Here," he murmured, "is to Prudence."

There was a little space of silence. The young girl said:

"Tell me about yourself. Do you live here?"

"I come from the East," he answered. "I come from a little country place, like you, but lately I have been working in Chicago. I lost my job there. . . . I drank too much. . . . I'm here now looking for another job."

"Were you ever here before?"

"Never before."

"Then I'll show you the town," she cried.

John Cave

In a hansom they set out to see the town.

The hansom rolled smoothly over the asphalted streets. Many fiery stars throbbed in the cold sky, and the frosty air was pleasant in their flushed faces.

"Isn't it jolly?" said Prudence.

"Isn't it?" he murmured.

She drew nearer to him. She was beautiful in the starlight. Her mouth was close to his.

CHAPTER II

It was three o'clock in the morning before he fell asleep, but he awoke groaning at nine and turned hurriedly, as though to escape something, to the other side of the bed. He was frightened; a misfortune seemed about to happen; and with an oath he arose as one flees.

It was the inevitable seesaw of drunkenness. As high as he had been lifted last night into a heaven of illusory happiness, so low was he now sunk in a hell of illusory despair.

Standing on his feet, he lurched a little. He felt quite helpless, as though he had lost all weight, as though the winds could blow him hither and thither like fluff. He floated, rather than walked, to the pitcher, and tremulously, the ice tinkling, he lifted it with both hands and drank for a long while.

Already he felt better, and the cold water of the bath proved a delight. He slipped into it luxuriously, letting it close over his head, and then he leaped up with a great splash, his flesh glowing, his eyes brilliant.

But the exhilaration of the bath passed off while

John Cave

he was dressing. Therefore a cocktail was needful, and he took it in the café downstairs, at a seat from which he could regard the people hurrying through the cold, bright, windy weather out of doors. A second cocktail made him quite happy and comfortable, and he gazed forth into the sunshine dreamily, thinking of last night.

They had driven in their hansom from this café to that, and he had a confused memory of the cafés: a memory of lofty, pale-hued rooms, where musicians played from balconies, and where he and Prudence, at small white tables, drank champagne and conversed with vivacity, bending forward towards each other. It had been pleasant, only Prudence had flirted a little with some young men. . . . She had promised to meet him here at eleven for breakfast. . . . There she was now. Very critically he regarded her approaching.

She hurried. The ends of the veil bound round her hat fluttered out in the great wind, and her skirt clung to her. She had to lean forward a little to advance, and this apparently amused her, for she bit her lip, as though to keep from laughing. When she saw him she waved her hand, then suddenly put up the other hand to her hat to keep it from blowing off.

He hastened out to meet her, and they paused beside the entrance to the hotel.

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"Oh," she said, laughing breathlessly, "isn't it nice this morning?"

She panted, her lips parted, her clear eyes shining softly; and as she stood before him her hair and her apparel streamed out in the wind in a charming, fluttering disorder.

"How do you feel?" he said.

"All right. Do I look all right?"

"You are beautiful," he answered.

Thereupon she put her feet together and bowed low; and this bow, gallant, boyish, gay, had the charm which characterised all her movements, the charm of an unconscious and free grace.

"I am hungry," she said, and they went in to breakfast.

They had a French breakfast, with fresh strawberries and an amber-coloured wine, and with their coffee they drank a little Tarragone. The room was empty, and sitting by a window, they laughed and talked as though they were at home. But the people hurrying by without had the most unpleasant expressions.

"I suppose," said Prudence, "that those people out there all have to work to-day."

"Yes, but we don't. We only have to play," said her companion.

They agreed, after breakfast, to take a drive in an automobile, and their waiter telephoned for them

John Cave

to one of the electric cab companies, and soon a tremendous hansom came on its broad rubber tyres down the street, and drew up by their window.

Prudence clapped her hands. "Hurry!" she said, "hurry!" She tugged gaily at her gloves, and while John waited for his change she paced the floor. "That waiter! Why doesn't he hurry?" she cried.

They seated themselves on the comfortable cushions of the hansom, and it started smoothly, and was soon gliding at a great rate of speed over the asphalt. And without abating its speed it curved in and out very marvellously among the horse vehicles, which seemed lumbering beside it.

"Don't the people stare at us?" said Prudence.

"They envy me," John answered.

"No; they envy me," said the young girl. She pressed his hand lightly beneath the rug, looked up in his eyes and laughed. "There," she resumed, nodding towards a grey building, "there is the girls' high school. That is where I ought to be."

"But this is nicer," said the young man.

"Well, I should say it was," she cried.

In a little while they were in the Park. The broad, white drive, deserted save for a lonely horseman or horsewoman here and there, had wooded hills upon the right, and on the left the river, which lay in the wind and sunshine rough and

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glittering. The speed of the hansom increased. The cold streamed in their faces. Leaves of yellow and red fluttered through the clear air and lay in myriads on the ground; then rose upon their stems, when a gust came suddenly, and scurried dancing together down the drive like gay little beings that had life.

"You promised me last night," said John, "that you would tell me all about yourself when you knew me better."

"Well, so I will," Prudence answered.

"Tell me now," he said, desiring to hear something extraordinary and pathetic, hoping to be deeply moved.

"You are inquisitive."

"Tell me," he urged.

"You can guess," she said, in a low voice.

.
A roadside inn appeared, and he directed the driver to stop at it. "We'll go in there," he said, "and drink a glass of champagne."

"That suits me," she answered, and she leaped gaily from the hansom.

But John, seated in the inn parlour, became silent and gloomy. For the desire to get drunk, which had been troubling him a little all the morning, possessed him now, and he was unhappy to perceive that he was going to yield to it.

John Cave

He asked himself feebly why he should yield, and all the molecules of his being answered in a chorus:

"You feel a febrile restlessness and a febrile discontent. This feeling permeates and possesses you. Therefore you cannot think of Prudence's beauty. You can only think that to be so wretched is not to be borne. And you know there is a remedy for your wretchedness. Hurry, then, to take the remedy. Hurry to drink yourself into a stupor, for there is now no other way for you to be at peace."

He emptied his glass, refilled it, emptied it again.

"Don't!" cried Prudence, trying to snatch the bottle away.

"Here, stop that!" he snarled.

He drank on and on until the figure of the young girl became indistinct, and the world, grown vague and immaterial, rocked slightly. . . . It seemed that Prudence was alarmed, that she was angry, that there were tears in her beautiful eyes. . . . She said good-bye to him, she disappeared. That was well, for he wished to be alone.

For three days his debauch lasted. They turned him out of his hotel because he could not settle his bill there, and they said they would hold his luggage until he should return and pay them. He drank beer and whisky. He scarcely slept or ate.

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He pawned his watch and rings. He neither shaved nor changed his linen. And at the end, with his last quarter-dollar, he got a bed in a cheap lodging-house, lay down without undressing, and, a vagabond among other vagabonds, slept fitfully, tormented by horrible dreams.

CHAPTER III

It rained, and it was dark and cold: a sodden morning. But John, without an umbrella, without an overcoat, without a cent, walked the streets because he had no place of shelter.

And he looked forlorn. Wet, unshaven, in soiled linen, his coat collar turned up, his hands in his pockets, his back bowed submissively, he plodded on. And from his hat brim, when he bent his head, there descended on him a little, chilly waterfall.

Musing on his case, he laughed a little. In five days he had fallen to a tramp's level, and he could not now try to uplift himself by applying anywhere for work because his appearance was a tramp's. He did not know how, in the future, he was to eat, nor where he was to sleep. There was not a soul in the world from whom he had the right to ask help.

He had eaten nothing since the morning of the day before, but he had no hunger, the absence of appetite being the natural sequence of his debauch. He had, though, the sense of an abnormal interior emptiness and lightness, and there were also oc-

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casional interior gripings, as though an impertinent hand squeezed some tender inner organ.

He walked very fast. That kept him warm. It also kept his thoughts upon the surface of his plight, kept them from plumbing its black depths, wherein, perhaps, drowsed, easily to be awakened, monstrous shapes of fear and despair.

Coming on a public library, he entered, selected a magazine, and tried to read. But his drenched trousers, when he was seated, glued themselves to his knees, wetting and chilling the flesh; and besides, to sit still brought on him an intolerable nervous depression. So he soon hurried out into the rain again.

Steam-coloured vapours sagged low in the sky. The world seemed hopeless, listless. But the rain-drops gave to the storm an effect of gaiety, for, as they broke upon the black sidewalks with their tiny silver splash, they resembled a host of little jack-stones spinning and leaping merrily together.

He approached a policeman on a corner, hesitated a moment, and said:

"I beg your pardon, but I am broke." He smiled miserably. "I have no friends here, and no money, and no place to sleep. Isn't there in this town some sort of a society that feeds and gives you a night's lodging in return for work that you do at wood-chopping?"

John Cave

"Yes. Here's one of their cards. You go up there at five o'clock," said the policeman.

As it was not yet noon, he returned to the public library to await the opening of the Wayfarers' Lodge, for that was the name, according to the card, of the institution that was to shelter him. He sat by a steam radiator, and sometimes he read, sometimes he mused. A young girl, pretty and bold, passed him, carrying a book. Her eyes ignored the unkempt figure, her eyes that a week ago would have caressed him. . . . And now thirst, followed by hunger, told him his stomach was recovering from the disorder occasioned in it by his intemperance, and set him to glancing very frequently at the clock. At last the hour he desired came, and John departed.

But it was cold out! Never before had the cold so tortured him. It trickled icily through his flesh, and like a man with palsy he could not restrain his continual and violent shivering. The twilight had come on. The fine rain rolled through the twilight its misty billows, and the street lamps shot lines of gold across the bluish dusk.

He knew the Wayfarers' Lodge a long way off, for about it there stood a crowd of sixty or seventy men without overcoats and without umbrellas. He approached them, he became one of them, and his heart sickened with disgust of his new brothers.

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Their dull eyes looked at nothing gloomily. Their collars were turned up, their hands were in their pockets, their backs were bowed submissively to the weather. Very red and lustrous from exposure were their noses, and the fine rain had coated their moustaches with a silvery powder.

The door of the lodge opened, a bar of yellow light divided the darkness, and down this bar of light a fat man came running.

"Get in line," he shouted, and he rushed here and there, pushing and pulling the men, while the rain fell on his bald head.

After the formation of the line he hurried back into the lodge again, and, from a desk near the door, admitted his pensioners and interrogated them, one at a time.

John in his turn entered. He gave his name, his last address, and his last occupation; and in a loud voice full of surprise and indignation the superintendent said he ought to be ashamed, with his advantages, to have fallen so low.

The unhappy young man passed down the room. It was clean and bare. There were two dining-tables in it and a bookcase, and on the white wall these texts were painted in red letters:

"Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging," and "I will return to my Father."

He descended slowly a dark staircase, approach-

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ing a great light from which, as from a megaphone, there issued the genial roar of a multitude of males conversing in close quarters. The light was an open doorway. He went through it, and found himself in a low-ceiled basement room crowded with his brothers.

In the illumination and the warmth their red and shining faces smiled. They smoked, conversed, laughed, bustled here and there with an air of absorption and importance. A heavy odour arose from their old, wet clothes.

Upon the benches that ran the length of each of the four walls they sat erect and close together; and they sat on the ledges of the three bath-tubs of rusty iron that stood in the middle of the room; and they sat on the floor. On a hanging shelf lay a disordered heap of magazines and works of fiction from which they were always tearing, in a preoccupied way, pages to light their pipes with.

In a corner two very old, tall, gaunt men kept to themselves. In another corner, a little apart, three negroes conversed in low voices with polite smiles. The rest made one family, one herd.

Now a little, thin old man near John took out of his pocket something wrapped in a square of newspaper. He unfolded the wrapping, and there was in his hand a piece of soap. He turned on the water in one of the bath-tubs. He washed, ab-

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sorbed in his task, his handkerchief, and, when it was clean, he put it to dry upon a line hung near the furnace.

Then a youth took off his stockings, replaced his shoes on his bare feet, and washed and hung his stockings up. The line soon was filled in this manner with drying handkerchiefs and drying stockings.

A bell rang, and an attendant led upstairs to the dining-room a squad that included John. At his plate he found a bowl of weak soup, a half-loaf of bread, and a cup of weak tea. He ate heartily.

His companions bartered their food with one another, some disliking soup, others disliking tea. What bread they had remaining at the meal's end they carried down to the basement with them in their pockets.

And down there it was gayer than ever after supper. Everybody smoked and conversed. All the faces, slightly flushed, smiled. The three negroes, withdrawn behind the furnace, shook with suppressed laughter.

But in their corner, side by side, aloof, the two tall, gaunt, old men sat silent and motionless, their aspect stern, sad, disdainful, their backs straight, their feet set firmly on the floor, their old hands on their bony knees.

An attendant put in the stoppers and turned on

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the spigots of the three rusty tubs. Instantly the men began to undress; but John did not follow them there. For he reasoned that, since there were over sixty compulsory baths to be taken, the filling and emptying of the tubs over sixty times would occasion for the majority a great deal of waiting. He, for his part, did not care to wait so long.

But the others disrobed with frantic haste, and were all naked in a moment. Sixty naked men, so closely crowded about the tubs that the soft white flesh of their shoulders and legs touched.

And as the tubs gradually filled they struggled for precedence. That mass of interlocked flesh, revolving slowly, squirmed, pushed, and gave out an angry murmur, a murmur of subdued remonstrances and objurgations.

"All right!" cried the attendant.

And they leaped, three and four at a time, into the water, where they touched themselves daintily here and there with their wetted palms, and then got out, and others took their places.

John, perceiving how the land lay, began now in his turn to throw off his clothes with frantic haste. For there was to be, it seemed, no change of the water, and it behooved him who desired a cleansing rather than a pollution to be one of the first to bathe.

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He undressed. With very long strides he tip-toed, shuddering, across the horrible floor, and he stepped into one of the tubs. . . .

But the three negroes waited until all the white men had finished before they got into the water in their turn. They waited naked in a corner; they looked tall and straight; they were silent; they had an air of proud humility.

CHAPTER IV

IN the morning, after they had chopped wood three hours in payment for their food and shelter, the men threw down their tools at the sound of a gong, and hurried gravely away, like business men hurrying to their offices.

But John departed slowly. More than ever he resembled a tramp now. Therefore he decided that he would take for the present some kind of manual work. He walked on with his eyes open for a building operation where he might ask for a place as a hod-carrier.

There was no warmth in the bright, hard sunshine, and the wind was cold. It seemed to pierce his chest, and a pain shot through his left side. Suddenly he was seized with a fit of coughing so violent that he had to stop and support himself while it racked and shook him. The street was a fashionable one, and many well-dressed persons, as they passed, regarded him, coughing in that way, with disapproval.

"Well! . . . John Cave!"

It was Prudence.

John Cave

He restrained, as well as he could, his cough, and, taking off his dusty hat, he addressed the young girl humbly.

"You are kind," he said, "to speak to me."

"What is the matter?" she said sadly.

"I have gone to pieces," he answered.

"Are you down — altogether down?"

He frowned. The stares of the passers-by embarrassed and angered him. In silence he regarded the pavement.

"Tell me — I want to know ——"

"But I can't tell you anything here."

"Will you come and see me, then? Soon? . . . This afternoon?"

"Yes," he said. "Yes, thank you. Good-bye."

"This is my address," said Prudence. She put a card in his hand. "Good-bye."

He did not intend, for shame, to go and see her, but at three places he failed to get a hod-carrier's job, and as the afternoon wore on the pain in his side increased. His cough hurt his chest. He was miserable with fatigue and cold. Just to warm himself, just to rest. . . .

And Prudence was awaiting him. Her rooms, in a subdued light, had an air of good taste, of luxury, of intimacy.

"By Jove," he said, "it is pleasant here."

John Cave

He warmed himself before the fire flaming in the grate. He rested in a deep, soft chair.

"I'm tired and sick," he said.

She put on a little table beside him a syphon and a spirit case. He drank, and immediately he was comfortable and happy.

"How in the world," said Prudence, "did you get in this condition?"

He lighted one of her Egyptian cigarettes, and, smoking and sipping his whisky and soda, he told her.

She was sympathetic, scornful, a little amused.

"You are a funny fellow," she said.

"I am a funny fellow," he agreed. "When I am at work, I long only for amusement. In the midst of amusement only work seems worth while."

"When you work, do you get on well?"

"Yes, I do," he answered; and, as the whisky magnified his good opinion of himself, he praised his talent as a reporter. In the pleasant room, before the bright fire, lounging in the big chair, a cigarette in one hand, the other toying with a whisky glass, he lauded himself extravagantly. And he would have kept on, perhaps, an hour, but he happened to catch sight of his reflection in a mirror, and that picture halted him. His look of happiness changed to one of disgust.

John Cave

"By Jove," he said, "I never thought I'd come to this."

He rubbed the brown bristles on his unshaven chin.

Prudence laughed. "Cheer up," she said. "We'll put you on your feet again."

She declared that they would dine together in her rooms. She telephoned to a fashionable restaurant, and in a little while their dinner arrived. She drew the heavy green curtains, and she set white candles on the table.

"Now," she said, "we'll have a jolly evening."

"Won't we?" said he.

He ate slowly, regarding with approval her Persian rugs, her pictures, and her chests and arm-chairs of carved wood.

"These things of yours," he said, "are fine. What is that black piece over there—a cupboard, a sideboard?"

"It is a *lit clos*," Prudence answered. She helped him to a quail and filled his glass.

"But aren't you going to drink anything?" he said.

"No." She looked at him strangely. "You can drink to-night. I'll do something else."

"What else?"

"Never mind."

John Cave

And after dinner, regarding him curiously, timidly, she brought forth a small, ornate silver tray whereon there lay a number of little, glittering instruments of strange form.

"You 'smoke,' eh?" he cried.

"Only now and then," said Prudence.

She made him draw the dinner-table and his chair nearer to the couch, and beside the couch, upon a tabouret, she laid the silver tray. She put out several of the candles in order to make the light softer, and, after a moment's withdrawal, she appeared in a flowing Eastern gown of yellow silk.

"We'll have a jolly evening," she repeated. "I'll lie on the couch and smoke. You'll sit here beside me with your champagne and your cigarettes."

She filled a tiny lamp with oil. Then she lay down. Her look was happy and absorbed and animal. She was enjoying in imagination a pleasure profound and degrading.

"This is peanut oil in my lamp," she said.

"I know," said he.

The opium, like black molasses, lay in a thick smear on a playing card. She took up a little on a long needle, and held it over the flame of the lamp. It cooked, boiling and bubbling and swelling; it changed from black to golden brown.

Prudence, reclining on the couch, rolled the cooked opium with her thumb and finger into a round pill.

John Cave

She put the pill upon her pipe, and she held the pipe in the flame, at the same time inhaling, with an ugly, bubbling, spluttering sound, the smoke of the burning drug.

"Do you like that?" said John.

"Yes, now and then, for a change."

And in the soft light, incessantly busy, like one who sews or knits, she cooked and rolled and smoked the opium pellets, absorbed and grave.

Her flesh had the fine texture and the pure, clear colour of the petal of a flower. Her lips were scarlet. Her dark eyes gleamed like moonlit water. She lay on her side, her hand supported her head, and when, now and then, she turned to look at him, he saw beneath her disarranged skirt the flash of thin ankles in stockings of amber-coloured silk.

"Haven't you any fear of getting the opium habit?" he asked.

"No," said Prudence. "I don't believe all those horrible stories that we hear about the opium habit."

"I suppose they are exaggerated."

"Yes, they are."

He rose and stirred the fire. Then, for a while, he paced the room.

"After I return to work," he said, "I'll look you up whenever I am going to take a day off. What jolly days we'll have together."

"When do you go to work?"

John Cave

"As soon as I have saved enough money to get my clothes back. I am going to work first as a hod-carrier, to save the money for my clothes."

She laughed.

"Oh, that is nonsense. I'll lend you the money you need."

"Thank you, but I couldn't think of borrowing from you."

"Why not?"

"Oh, on account of pride."

"But it was on me you spent all your money. You might as well let me help you. Then you can go to work to-morrow."

"But I tell you . . ."

He bent over and groaned, placing his hand to his side. A sudden and overwhelming pain had seized him. His hands, his body, his head, his whole being were drawn, as by a magnet, towards that intense pain. He crouched on the seat of the *lit clos*, contorted into a small knot: a small, shabby knot, writhing, grunting. . . .

"It is only pleurisy," said the physician. "He'll be himself again in a few days."

CHAPTER V

LIKE messenger boys the reporters of *The Press* sat in the dusty local room, awaiting the errands upon which the city editor would send them forth.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon, and the reporters should have gone forth long ago; but the city editor had not come down to the office until one, and now he was reading the papers: a task he ought to have finished before twelve.

Unshaven and stale-looking, the city editor read listlessly, a pencil held in his mouth crosswise. The reporters — two boys of twenty and a half-dozen men of middle age — lounged in their chairs with their untidy feet on the desks; they held newspapers open at arm's length before them, and, smoking cigars or pipes, they vilified the various persons of eminence who figured in the news. A group of incompetents, of failures, of coarse and jealous minds, they abused everything successful because they were unsuccessful themselves.

John Cave entered, fresh and clean again, a flower in his buttonhole, a stick in his well-gloved hand.

John Cave

"The city editor?" he said, in a loud, pleasant voice.

"I am the city editor."

Collier had taken the pencil from his mouth. He looked at John with his hard, bright eyes, cocking to one side his small head with its tuft of stiff hair, and in this position he resembled a parrot.

"I want to get a place as a reporter," said John. "At *The Sun* office they told me to try here."

Collier yawned, stretching out his arms to their full length.

"We do need a man," he said. "I'll talk to you in a little while. Sit down."

John took up a copy of *The Press*, and while he waited he studied the paper's character.

The paper seemed to him too big. There was too much matter in it, and all this matter was dull. Nowhere did earnestness, nowhere did humour manifest itself upon those huge and dreary pages. Every article he read appeared to have been written by a stupid man half asleep.

He took note of the assignments that the city editor gave to the reporters. The assignments all pertained to dull and heavy things—to business, politics, prosaic meetings and conventions. And yet, properly considered, the news was replete with things strange and interesting, with sad things,

John Cave

humorous things, things of an amazing and incredible oddity. These the city editor ignored.

When all the men had been sent forth, Collier turned to John, asked him a few questions, and engaged him.

"You can begin now," he said. "There isn't anything in the way of an assignment, though ——"

But the other interrupted with respectful ardour: he would suggest an assignment.

"Very well," said Collier, in a resigned voice.

Then John pointed out in that day's paper a brief paragraph wherein there lay, he claimed, the root of a novel and ludicrous story.

But the editor, who had been putting on his coat, said in reply to the enthusiastic and eager young man:

"Oh, I don't know. That story is not in our line. By the way, here is something for you, after all. There is a corner-stone laying this afternoon. It is six miles up town. There is the address. Get us something about it."

Collier sauntered out, and John swore in a low voice, for it disgusted him to be assigned to an unimportant corner-stone laying. That was leg work, not head work. Had *The Press* no novices, no boy reporters, to do such work as that?

Nevertheless he attended the laying of the corner-stone, and an aged bishop revived his enthusiasm

John Cave

by giving him, at the end of the ceremony, an important piece of news.

The bishop, an authority upon mine labour, accidentally let slip the news that Fipps, the great millionaire, would open his new house formally in two days with a dinner to the President, and at this dinner the President and a half-dozen Americans of almost equal eminence would discuss a new policy for their party on the Labour question.

Nothing about the dinner had been printed. No one knew anything about it save Fipps and his six or seven guests. Therefore to publish, to-morrow, the first and only announcement of the dinner would be a great honour; but the day after, undoubtedly, the whole story would be public property.

John hastened to Fipps's office. The secretary kept him waiting in the anteroom an hour, then led him in. Fipps, seated at his great, neat desk, a rosewood desk as big and lustrous as a piano, looked up to see if his visitor's face was familiar, and then looked away again with the cold aloofness of age in his eyes.

"Well, what do you want?"

John gazed with profound interest at this old man who, once a butcher, had climbed to the top-most heights of power and wealth because he had been first to foresee the marvellous future of the

John Cave

electric car, and first to introduce this car upon street railways.

"I want to ask you, Mr. Fipps," he said, "about the dinner you are giving to the President."

"What?"

Fipps frowned down at his polished desk. John stood beside him, looking at his beautiful linen, at his alert, resolute and hard face.

"Your dinner to the President, sir. I want to write an article about it."

"I have nothing to say."

Those words made John unhappy, and yet they were the words he had expected. He wanted (and Fipps knew it) a menu of the dinner, a statement of its purpose, a description of the dining-room, the cost of the gold plate—all those things, really and naturally interesting, which nevertheless were in bad taste. Indeed, an article such as John hoped to write would be apt, if it appeared, to keep the President away from Fipps's dinner.

"If you will tell me——"

"I have nothing to say."

John moved round the great desk until he faced the millionaire. Fipps looked up at him, and he, smiling down, said:

"Mr. Fipps, my paper wants a description of this dinner. If I can't get it, another man will be sent out for it. I must get it. If you won't help

John Cave

me, I'll have to patch the story together out of pieces of gossip — your friends' gossip."

"Don't print anything. I am not going to give a dinner," said the old man, and, still frowning, he took up a letter as a sign for John to go.

"But Bishop Blany told me ——"

"I don't care what Bishop Blany told you."

John, confused, dismayed, for the moment utterly at a loss, departed in silence.

He went out to Fipps's great house of white marble in the country. As he had expected, the preparations for the dinner went on busily there. The gardeners were carrying plants from the green-houses. The waggons of grocers and fruiterers were coming and going. At the station he even learned the hour of the special train's arrival.

And thus, by dusk, he had obtained enough facts for a two-column story. He went home, and in the quietude of his little room he wrote the story swiftly and carefully. Putting it in his pocket, he hurried out to a restaurant, ate a sandwich, and at last returned to *The Press* office.

The city editor had departed, and the night city editor was now in charge.

"My name is Cave," John said. "I was taken on this afternoon."

"You are about three hours late. You ought to have been back by six o'clock," said the night city

John Cave

editor. "There is a church meeting up town you ought to have gone to two hours ago."

This reproof was administered in a loud and threatening tone, and a copy reader and three or four reporters looked up with interest from their work.

"Yes," said John, "I know I am late, but I have a good excuse to offer you." He took the Fipps story from his pocket and laid it before the night city editor. "This is a story about a dinner Mr. Fipps is going to give the President. The dinner will have political importance, for all the leaders of the President's party will attend it, and Bishop Blany will talk about the Labour question."

The night city editor, a dark, handsome man, listened with a sneer, and he turned over the pages of John's voluminous manuscript disdainfully.

"This is all right, if it's true," he said. "Have you seen Fipps?"

"Yes, but ——"

"Well, what does he say?"

"Fipps denies it, but ——"

The other handed the manuscript back to John. "That settles it. If Fipps denies it ——"

"But I am not a fool," John cried. "There are a hundred confirmations of this story. I've seen the bishop. I've seen the fruiterers. I've seen the chef. I know all about the special train that will

John Cave

bring the President." Indignation and disgust overcame his prudence. "Here I bring you a good story, and you treat me as though I came to borrow money," he said.

"You had better hurry up town to that meeting."

"Won't you read my manuscript? I don't believe I have made the interest of the story clear to you. Listen," John persisted. "The leading politicians and financiers of America will attend this dinner. It is probable that they will agree on a new policy for the next presidential campaign. Besides, Fipps is spending money on the dinner with a lavishness passing belief. He has cabled to London, to Covent Garden Market, for peaches that will cost him four dollars apiece."

But the night city editor turned away with an inarticulate sound like a snarl, and John set out for the up-town meeting, carrying in his hand the rejected story — a bulky yellow packet of which he now felt ashamed.

But afterwards, the more he thought of the story, the better it seemed to him.

"By Jove, I won't be beaten like this. I'll sell the thing somewhere else," he said.

And in a few minutes he was conversing over the long-distance telephone with the managing editor of the most successful newspaper in America, *The*

John Cave

Dispatch. The managing editor heard him out in silence. Then he said:

"That is a good story. Wire it over — to me personally — at once. We'll use it in full to-morrow morning, and if no other paper has it we will give you a special rate of fifteen dollars a column."

Comforted, delighted, John consigned his manuscript to a telegraph operator and hastened up town to his church meeting.

The story, the next morning, appeared duly. Printed in big type and illustrated with photographs of Fipps's house and guests, it covered half *The Dispatch's* front page. More fully illustrated, augmented besides with interviews with the guests, it covered half the front page of the afternoon papers. And it appeared all over America the following day. It even appeared in *The Press*.

CHAPTER VI

THE Fipps matter did John no good in *The Press* office. It rather did him harm. The reporters shunned him, and the night city editor sneered at him, and made remarks intended to insult him. But the night city editor would not meet the young man's eye when he sneered, nor were his offensive remarks ever direct enough to be taken up.

Altogether John had a hard time of it. After his long debauch, by way of revulsion, he was filled with the most virtuous sentiments, with the greatest eagerness for work. Yet here, day after day, he did nothing but attend church meetings and cornerstone layings; but gather and write items of news that never required more than a paragraph; but hurry ten miles north or six miles west on tasks a little child could have accomplished as well as he.

His hours were from one in the afternoon till midnight. In the superb autumnal mornings he walked, after his ten o'clock breakfast, in the Park. He walked beside the river. And as he paced the sunlit paths, as he breathed the cold and pure air, he felt clean in body and in spirit. The thought of wine revolted him. The thought of tobacco re-

John Cave

volted him. Sluggishness and vice seemed impossible. He wanted nothing but work.

Fresh from the open air, overflowing, like a fiery horse, with vigour and energy and ambition, he would enter *The Press* office at one, only to sit there like a messenger boy for two full hours — the first, best hours of the reporter's day — awaiting the work that the city editor, always behindhand, should have had ready for him on his arrival. And as he waited, all his hopeful, cheery energy departed, till, by the time he got his assignment, he was dispirited and limp, and, taking his task from Collier with a faint sneer, he walked out swearing.

Thus three weeks passed. It was certainly discouraging. . . .

Collier rose one afternoon from his chair. Taking the blue pencil from between his teeth, he gave one of those tremendous yawns that extended his arms to their full length, that opened his mouth wide, that lifted him up on the tips of his toes. Then, in his high, nasal drawl, he said:

"Cave, look here."

"Well?" said John.

"I want you to go to a meeting of the Emerson Club to-night. The Emerson Club is literary. Some verses are to be read before it in competition for a prize, and Gates, the Irish poet, is to speak."

John went to the Emerson Club. Its meeting-

John Cave

place was a fashionable theatre, and its members resembled a fashionable theatre's audience, the women in pale gowns, with bare arms and shoulders, and the men in the lustrous black and white of evening dress, with white waistcoats and white gloves. Everywhere huge diamonds glittered icily, and those long strings of large, pure pearls surely represented a great outlay of magazine sonnets.

A row of seats was reserved for reporters, and here, in their dusty clothes and muddy boots, a half-dozen reporters sat huddled together, as unpleasantly conspicuous, amid all that shimmering elegance, as a blot on a white page.

Behind the reporters was a young man with grey hair. He beckoned to John.

"You are on *The Press*, aren't you?" he said.

"Yes," said John. "Haven't I seen you at *The Press* office, too?"

"Oh, yes. I am a *Press* man." He smiled pleasantly. "Sit down."

John, seating himself, looked about. "Literature," he said, "must be picking up. Among literary persons such splendour as this is unusual, isn't it?"

"Oh, these persons aren't literary exclusively. They are ladies and gentlemen first, literary persons afterwards. Banker-poets. That sort of thing. You know the type," said the young man.

John Cave

"And do they all write? All of them?"

"Yes, they all write, I am afraid."

"What do they write?"

"They write what is called magazine poetry. You see their work at the bottoms of the pages of the duller and more expensive magazines. 'Consolation,' a couplet, by Mary Greeley Stewart Stevens. 'Restitution,' a quatrain, by Jethro Howard Wilson. Tiny things, tinier almost than their authors' names, they are rhymed correctly, and there is even a thought in them; but they lack life, music. They are conventional, mechanical little poems, as correct and commonplace and dead as the essay of an intelligent schoolgirl."

The white-gloved hands of the members of the Emerson Club beat together gently. A faint, polite applause filled the air. A little man appeared at the back of the stage, and advanced towards the footlights with a quick, awkward waddle. He was thin, and he bent forward from the waist affectedly. His hair and his draggled moustache had a faded, parched colour. He looked as dry as the Sahara, as dry as a dried fish.

"Who is that dried-up little chap?" said John.

"That is Morrison Melvil, the president of the club," said his companion.

"And behind him . . . is that Gates?"

"Yes, that is Gates. How young he looks."

John Cave

The poet, tall and slim and dark, stood in the shadow, glancing to right and left with timid interest. He did indeed look young. He looked no more than twenty. Yet he was far older than twenty. But the dreams among which he lived had shed over him something of their imperishable beauty, and to him the world would always be as fresh and strange as it is to a child. He would never, perhaps, look old. He would never feel old.

Morrison Melvil introduced him, saying stupid and obvious things with a vivacious manner. He praised the work of Gates a little, but he condemned with prim severity certain tendencies in it, certain departures. . . .

"The little ass," said John's companion. "He is condemning the very things Gates will live by. The new things, the original things. . . . I knew they were what he would condemn."

There was a burst of applause, and the poet advanced to the front of the stage. He looked like a slim and diffident youth. He bowed, he ran his hand through his dark hair, and he began to speak in a musical voice. He spoke in simple phrases. He tried very hard, it was evident, to make his thoughts quite clear. About him there was nothing of pose, nothing of affectation. He was as absorbed and as unconscious as a child at play alone.

Many beautiful women, as they listened, regarded

John Cave

him with an air of delicate and tender sympathy. But the men smiled quizzically at one another. They had come to see a charlatan; that, therefore, was what they saw. For these literary men took their literary opinions, ready-made, from such sources as they deemed trustworthy. For fear of error they never dared to form opinions of their own.

Gates spoke on the drama. He said he thought the play the highest form of literary art. He told how he and certain friends of his were devoting themselves to the writing of plays, some writing in verse, others writing in prose, and he described the themes of his friends' plays, and he read from them passages powerful and beautiful. Then he took up certain popular plays, and showed how false and shallow and tawdry they were. He showed how they depended altogether for their success upon crude, false sentimentality, upon sumptuous scenery. In conclusion he advocated simpler stage settings: then, since the success or failure of a play would not involve a fortune, many more plays would be produced. And the result would be a more varied and a better drama. He was working, he said, for a better drama. That was all.

That was all, and now, one at a time, the three leading lights of the Emerson Club replied to Gates. A reply must be a contradiction. Each of the three,

John Cave

therefore, contradicted, and each used towards the poet a tone of mocking condescension.

The first speaker said it was impossible to return to simpler stage settings. He had seen a Greek play the night before where the settings had been superlatively simple, and yet this play had been a failure; there had hardly been a hundred people in the house. Thus it was proved that simple stage settings would mean empty theatres.

The second speaker was ironical. He used the phrase "to elevate the stage" with excellent comic effect; he had only to utter it to send a roar of laughter through the hall. And somehow, in his auditors' minds, even in his wiser auditors' minds, the mere repetition of this contemptuous phrase turned all who wished to "elevate the stage" into a pack of silly and conceited fools.

The third speaker had once collaborated with an actor-manager on a Japanese play that had had a long run. He spoke, therefore, with authority. What he said was that those who condemned the modern drama were only sore and bitter because they could not write money-making plays themselves.

Gates, during these speeches, looked bewildered, dismayed. When they asked him to make a few concluding remarks, he rose and faltered:

"I am afraid I did not make my meaning suf-

John Cave

ficiently clear to you. I am afraid you did not understand me. All I meant to say was that we want the best plays we can get. I am sure you all agree with me in your hearts, but I have not perhaps the gift of expression, of oral expression."

He made a little hopeless gesture and sat down. They laughed and applauded him indulgently. It had been a bad rout for him, they said.

Morrison Melvil, smiling, rose again, and held up his hand to quiet the mocking mirth. He said in a good-natured voice that, having heard both sides of the question, the audience perhaps agreed that the poet's ideas were neither wise nor practical. . . . The reading of the prize poems was now in order. This year's prize, said Mr. Melvil, would be ten dollars in gold.

The competing poets numbered seven. They were all males, they all wore white gloves, and one had his manuscript rolled in a slender cylinder and tied with a pale blue ribbon. Each poet, before he began to read, made three profound bows, the first to the president, the second to the judges, the third to the audience. The competition was conducted in a solemn and stately manner.

The poems were like all poems that are written for a prize. One was a threnody, one was an ode, one was a lyric . . . but at this point John and his new friend departed.

John Cave

In the street they laughed a little as they lighted their cigarettes.

"Threnodies, odes, lyrics," said the young man with grey hair, "written in competition for a prize of ten dollars, and read with white gloves on the hands."

"This is the most provincial city I ever saw," said John. "It is not yet ten o'clock, and already Peanut Street is deserted. Everybody is in bed. This isn't a city; it is an overgrown village."

"How do you like *The Press*?" said the young man, frowning.

"Not at all."

A motor car stood before a silent hotel. Suddenly, with an abundance of gay laughter, a young girl and two young men came down the white marble steps, between two rows of electric lamps that flooded them with light. The young girl wore no covering on her dark hair, her gown and cloak were white, and her white shoes could be seen as she descended the steps of marble.

The chauffeur leaped from his seat, and began to arrange the robes in the car. Suddenly the young girl cried in a clear voice:

"Well, John Cave!"

"Prudence," he said confusedly.

She gave him her hand.

John Cave

"You might have called," she said. "You might have written."

"I know," said he. "I am working on *The Press*."

"Do you like *The Press*?"

"No."

"Then I am going to introduce you to Mr. Miles."

She turned to the taller of her companions, who was talking to the chauffeur.

"Harry," she said, "come here."

"Well, what is it?" he said. "We haven't much time, you know."

Prudence, smiling, took his arm.

"I am going to introduce Mr. Cave to you. Mr. Cave," she explained, "is a friend of mine, and I want you to take him on your paper."

The two young men laughed.

"Are you — ah — the Mr. Miles?" John asked.

"I suppose so," said the other. "I run *The Dispatch*."

He took a card from his pocket. "Here is my card," he said. "Do you really want a job?"

"Oh, I don't know," John answered. "I am on *The Press* now."

"Well, come and see me some time in New York," said Mr. Miles. And he took back the card and scrawled a line on it. "This," he explained, "will get you in to me at any time."

John Cave

"Thank you."

"Be sure and come," said Mr. Miles. He laughed. "Any friend of Prudence's is a friend of mine."

John took leave, a little awed, for Miles, a young millionaire from the South, had recently established in New York a newspaper that in expenditure and brilliance and vulgarity left its neighbours far behind.

"Do you know who that young man was?" he said to his companion. "It was Miles."

"Henry Miles?"

"Yes."

The automobile sped away with a musical drone, and Prudence waved her white hand.

"Come and see me, John Cave," she called.

"So you don't like *The Press*?" resumed the young man with grey hair.

"I certainly don't."

"But you appear to be getting on well. That murder story on the front page this morning was yours, wasn't it?"

"No. The story of the corner-stone laying on the ninth page was mine. Perhaps you overlooked it. It was only seven lines long."

The young man's manner suddenly changed. He regarded John sternly.

"Oh," he said, "you are Cave, eh?"

John Cave

John, hurt and puzzled, returned his angry stare.

"Yes, I'm Cave. What of it?"

"Well, if you are Cave, I don't wonder you dislike *The Press*. You have made a bad start there with that Fipps matter."

"What the deuce do you know about the Fipps matter?"

"I know all about it."

"Do you?" said John. "Then what did I do wrong?"

"You should have given the Fipps story to your own paper instead of selling it to New York."

"By Jove, is that what they say?" John cried. "The cowardly liars."

"Isn't it true?"

"Of course it isn't true. *The Press* refused to print the Fipps story."

The young man's manner changed again.

"Oh," he said. "Then I was misinformed. Tell me your side."

But John was sore and angry. "I'll leave *The Press* to-morrow," he said. "I'd rather starve than work with such contemptible liars."

"Tell me your side of it," the young man repeated.

"Oh, what is the use? I am sick of the whole business."

John Cave

"But if you are being treated unjustly I can help you."

"You? How?"

"Don't you know who I am?"

"No."

"I am Norris."

"The managing editor?"

"Yes."

John, halting, gave a loud laugh. "I am meeting all sorts of celebrities to-night," he said.

And then, as they walked onward, he narrated slowly and carefully the story of the Fipps dinner.

"Well?" he said, at the end.

"They told me," said Norris, "that you sold the story without offering it to *The Press*."

"The liars. If I did that, why didn't they discharge me?"

"You were to be discharged — to-morrow."

"Am I to stay now?"

"Yes, of course."

The old *Press* building appeared. They went up together in the old, slow elevator.

"Good-night," said the managing editor. "I'll see you get better work to do."

"No more corner-stone layings?"

"No more corner-stone layings." Norris smiled and tugged at his white gloves. "Good-night."

CHAPTER VII

JOHN'S bedroom, on the fifth floor of an apartment house, fronted a fashionable street, and from his window he often studied a girl across the way.

Sometimes, with an elderly woman, she came forth to drive in the Park. Her departure made a stately and splendid picture. On the box of the glittering victoria, restraining easily his restive horses, the coachman sat erect and still. The footman stood by the curbstone, a folded laprobe on his arm. The butler opened the huge doors; the two women entered the victoria modestly; and John, from his lofty window, peered down with admiration and awe.

Sometimes the girl came forth to walk, dressed trimly, like a boy, in rough cloth, and holding in leash a Russian deerhound.

In the evening, descending the marble stairs in the clear twilight, she was like a fairy princess in her pale splendour. Then she was clad from head to foot in white. She wore a long white cloak. There were white flowers in her yellow hair.

From his window John admired her, and one

John Cave

day, as she was entering her brougham, he thought her eyelids fluttered, and her dark blue eyes met his. Of this, however, he could not be sure.

He had good work to do now on *The Press*. He reported murder trials and the launching of great ships; he interviewed statesmen, poets, princes, all the city's distinguished visitors; and nearly every morning he had a column of matter on the front page. To his salary, moreover, five dollars had been added.

His demeanour in the office changed with success. Diffidence, in the beginning, had caused him to appear a quiet and modest youth, a sympathetic, appreciative youth, and the reporters had liked him in a condescending way, feeling indulgently that here was one who realised, who even perhaps exaggerated, his immense inferiority to themselves.

But with success his tongue was loosened, and he criticised everybody freely. He meant no harm, he never dreamed his words might be repeated. But the attitude of reporter after reporter changed from friendship to bitter enmity, and at each change he remembered something harsh and cruel that he had said, and, shocked, he resolved to be more prudent. The resolve, however, soon passed.

Always, at breakfast, he read eagerly his story in *The Press*. If it had been edited by the night city editor it appeared unaltered, but if Gray, the copy

John Cave

reader, had handled it, he hardly knew it for his own.

Gray was sometimes called the rubber stamp man. For eighteen years he had been reading copy on *The Press*, and certain dog-eared phrases for certain commonplace things had written themselves on his mind ineradicably. Hence, when one of these things came up, its appropriate phrase must always go with it, and if the reporter had not used the phrase, Gray, in editing the young man's matter, put it in.

According to Gray's creed, an article concerning a public square must always term the square a "breathing spot." A kiss must be called an "osculation." An oyster was a "succulent bivalve." A disease was never caused, or brought on—it was always "superinduced." Any place or edifice over fifty years of age must be dubbed "historic old"—"historic old Christ Church," or "historic old Strawberry Mansion."

And because in every story he handled Gray inserted "breathing spot," or "osculation," or "historic old," or "succulent bivalve," or "superinduced," the men said that he had a rubber stamp for each of these phrases, and that he would, when one of them was needed, stamp it in instead of bothering to write it.

Gray destroyed everything original, everything

John Cave

picturesque, in the stories he edited. He made them all read as if they had been written by himself, by a stupid, commonplace man of forty-five.

His work began at four in the afternoon, and did not end till three the next morning, and, since he lived out of town, he was obliged to return home on the street railway's night line: a ride of ninety minutes. The night line ran irregularly, and Gray sometimes stood an hour on a corner awaiting his car. In winter, in the dreary hours before the dawn, the cold tortured him unspeakably as he waited for the infernal night line at some deserted, wind-swept crossing, leaning, muffled in his coat, against a lamp-post; the loneliest of figures, often obscured in a swirl of snow.

He had worked on *The Press* twenty years, and during the eighteen years he had been reading copy his low salary had not once been raised. He was fat and silent, saying, when he did speak, mean and cruel things that he accompanied with a sour laugh.

He and the city editor sat at their desks one day, and John awaited his afternoon assignment at the other end of the local room. The city editor took the pencil from his mouth and drawled:

"The Maharajah of Kapurtha has reached town. I think I'll send Cave out to interview him."

"Cave!" said Gray. "Oh, Lord!"

John Cave

The two men were speaking in low tones, but John's ears were sharp.

"Why, what's the matter with Cave?" said the city editor.

"He's no good. He doesn't know how to get a story, and he doesn't know how to write one."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Collier, and he mused a moment, smiling; then he summoned John, and gave him the Maharajah interview.

"We want a good story, mind," he said.

"I'll try to get you a good story," the young man answered. He glanced at Gray, and his heart overflowed with rage and bitterness.

"You won't edit my copy, though, Mr. Gray," he said.

Gray looked perplexed, angered.

"Uh — what do you mean?"

"I mean you don't know how to edit copy. You spoil every story you handle. But you'll spoil no more of my stories."

"I won't, eh? We'll see about that."

John, beside himself, leaned over Gray's table, shook his forefinger at the fat, elderly man, and shouted:

"You'll never read another line of my copy, Gray. You are not fit for a copy desk. You are a stupid and illiterate ass."

Gray rose.

John Cave

"Damn you," he cried shrilly.

But Collier, who had been listening, intensely amused, now interfered.

"Go get your story, Cave," he said. "Sit down, Gray. Don't be a fool."

John found the Maharajah, and had no difficulty in obtaining an interview. As a topic for discussion he suggested polygamy, and on this topic the prince was quite willing to talk. He said many ingenuous and amusing things in polygamy's praise, and by the way he attacked monogamy in strong terms.

John returned to the office and wrote three quarters of a column, taking great pains. By the time he had finished his story the city editor was gone. The night city editor and Gray were reading copy. Their desks were side by side.

John crossed the room, lighted a cigarette, and laid his copy on the night city editor's desk.

Gray looked up.

"I'll take that copy," he said; and he held out his hand for it.

John glared at him. Then he turned to the night city editor.

"Will you read this copy, Mr. Jones?" he said.

The night city editor, bent over his work, answered:

"Oh, Gray will handle it."

"No, I'll be hanged if he will."

John Cave

There came from the reporters a chorus of loud laughter. The night city editor swung round in his chair and frowned at John.

"What is the matter with you?" he growled.

John put his left hand in his pocket because it was trembling. His trembling right hand, which held his cigarette, he steadied on a desk. The reporters' mocking laughter, the inimical looks of Jones and Gray, depressed him, extinguished the fire of rage in his heart, and he asked himself if this ludicrous squabbling was worth while. But he could not retreat now. And so he said, loud enough for all to hear:

"Mr. Gray rewrites every story of mine he handles. Now I work hard on my stories: if they have to be rewritten, then I am no good, and I ought to be fired. I claim they don't have to be rewritten. I won't have them rewritten. Either they'll be printed as I write them, or I'll leave *The Press*."

Jones, restraining one of his rare smiles, said querulously:

"Oh, don't make a fuss over nothing. You don't write literature for a newspaper."

"His stuff is rot," said Gray.

The room rang with laughter again.

"That's all right if it's rot," John stammered.

"You bet it's all right," said Gray.

John Cave

The young man turned again to the night city editor.

"Is Mr. Gray to handle my copy?" he asked.

"I can't make any exception in your case. I have no authority to treat you differently from the other men," the night city editor answered. "The fact is, you've become a nuisance around here lately."

"Very well," said John, and he left the room, laughter pursuing him, cruel laughter, which stung like a whip-lash.

He found the managing editor in his office alone.

"Mr. Norris," he began, "I believe you are a friend of mine."

The other looked in surprise at this pale young man with twitching lips and wild eyes.

"I believe so," he answered.

"You are the only friend I have succeeded in making on *The Press*. I appear to have made only enemies here."

Norris smiled.

"Calm yourself," he said.

John in a ghastly way smiled back. Then he resumed:

"I have had some trouble in the local room. It is like this. When Mr. Gray reads my copy, he re-writes it, he spoils it, invariably. I have put up with this. To-day, though, I heard him say I was

John Cave

no good, and I determined then to put up with it no longer. I told him he should never read another line of my copy. But Mr. Jones won't back me up: he says he has no authority. So now I appeal to you. I have just turned in an interview with the Maharajah of Kapurtha that I wrote very carefully, and if Gray handles it, I—well, I am going to leave *The Press* to-night. Now you say you are a friend of mine, and ——”

John hesitated, looking at Norris wistfully.

Norris, in a muse, regarded his polished nails. Then he jumped up and paced the floor with quick steps.

“Cave,” he said, “I know quite well Gray's limitations. But we all have our limitations, haven't we? Even you and I—we have our limitations, eh? And we must remember that Gray has worked for *The Press* twenty years. He has given his youth to *The Press*. And now he is getting old. And I don't want him to think us ungrateful. However ——”

Norris paused before John, and looked at him with a sudden, friendly smile.

“Go and get your Maharajah story,” he said. “I'll edit it. And to-morrow I'll see what can be done.”

John, a little sorry now for Gray, returned to the local room.

John Cave

"Mr. Jones," he said, "I am to take my story to Mr. Norris."

"Gray has it," Jones answered.

Gray gave the young man a malevolent glance, and pushed a mass of yellow manuscript towards him. The first two pages of this manuscript were in Gray's handwriting: John's first two pages were missing. He looked in the waste-paper basket beside the copy desk, and, seeing them there, he picked them out. Then he returned to Norris with his story.

"You see?" he said excitedly. "He had already rewritten two pages, and here are mine — I found them in his waste-paper basket. Now you can judge between us."

"Very well," said Mr. Norris. "Come and see me here to-morrow at two."

And he bent over the yellow manuscript busily.

John's story, unchanged in any way, was on the front page of *The Press* the next morning, and in the afternoon Norris promoted him from the local to the editorial department.

He now wrote brief leaders on odd topics, and went out, under Norris's direction, to prepare special articles for the Sunday edition. Occasionally these articles were signed — a great honour.

And five dollars more was added to his salary.

John found that on *The Press* the editors, like

John Cave

the reporters, were in a rut. Each editor had held the same post for twelve or fifteen years; his work had become mere dull routine to him, like brick-laying or street-sweeping; and he drowsed the day away at his desk, writing a column of matter mechanical and dead, while in his head the unused brain dried and shrivelled.

"How does *The Press* maintain its circulation?" John said one night to the managing editor.

"It doesn't maintain it," the other answered. "For two years the circulation has declined at the rate of five hundred a month."

He rose suddenly. It was midnight, and they were supping after the day's work.

"There is Gates," he said. "I'll bring him over."

And he zigzagged, napkin in hand, amongst the small white tables towards a tall figure in black. He disappeared behind a palm. Then, in a little while, he and Gates returned together.

The poet was not hungry, but he would be glad, he said, to smoke a cigarette, and drink a *café verre*. And sitting beside John, he looked about him with childlike interest, and he began to talk in his timid, gentle and simple manner.

John had read two years ago his blank verse drama of *The Shadowy Waters*, and the deep, strange music of the lines had enraptured him.

John Cave

He thought the poem a great work of art, a great work of genius; and here beside him sat the poet, modest, simple, kindly; interested, like a child, in everything.

"We were talking," said the managing editor, "about *The Press*. We were telling one another how bad it is."

"I hope you'll keep on," said Gates. "American journalism amuses me."

"We were saying that *The Press* had been falling in circulation at the rate of five hundred copies a month."

"What is the trouble?" said Gates.

"The trouble," said the managing editor, "is that *The Press* has grown old."

For a moment he was silent and a little sad. Then he resumed:

"A paper ages as a man ages. When it is young it makes its success. Why? Because, then, its owners and editors work together with enthusiasm, sincerity, and fear of failure; because, diffidently, tremulously, they do their best. That is what it is to be young. That is how youth works."

He lighted at one of the candles a long cigarette.

"*The Press* worked like that," he said. "*The Press* was the first one-cent newspaper in America. It was enterprising, brave, in its youth."

"And success came to it, as success comes to all

John Cave

hard and sincere and modest work, and success had a bad effect on it. The work became less hard, less modest. *The Press* drifted into old age."

He sighed philosophically over the coffee and tobacco.

"Rejuvenate it," said Gates.

"If I only could!" he murmured. "But that would mean a clean sweep of all hands—an impossibility. For the owner would never consent to the dismissal of all those old fellows who worked their hardest for him in their youth; and, if he would consent, I could never discharge them, for I have known them ten years, twenty years, since I was a boy fresh from school; and I could no more turn them out than I could turn out my own father."

"And I suppose they hold," said Gates, "all the good places, eh?"

"All, all," said the managing editor.

"You and your owner are in a strange position," mused the poet. "To do right, to make your paper good and worthy again, it is needful to discharge all your old men—to ruin all your old friends."

"Yes," the other agreed. "The head of a newspaper, if he would do his best, must be as cruel as death. He must be always on the watch, and at the least sign of weariness or of age in a man, the man must go."

"He must drain the first fine youthful enthusiasm

John Cave

from his men," said Gates, "and when that is gone, he must throw them aside. To do the best for his paper, he must do the worst for his men. To do well, he must do ill."

"That is true of journalism," said the managing editor. He added, "It is true of other things, I fancy."

"It is true of no good thing," said Gates.

Excitedly the poet pushed back his slender glass of coffee.

"When I work hard," he said, "no pain results. The harder I work, the happier I am, and the better I am. And my work harms no one. On the contrary, if it is work well done, it makes the world happier and better."

"True," said the managing editor.

"I love my work," said Gates.

"But you are poor. You can't make a living from your work."

"No matter. I love it. It rewards me. To achieve in a line a certain slow and mournful music . . . that is worth striving for . . . it is happiness."

John walked home that night discontented. He wished that he, too, was a faithful servant of art, like Gates. A great distaste for his newspaper work seized him.

"What is it?" he said to the stars. "Why, it is

John Cave

nothing but gossip. I am wasting my life writing gossip." And, still discontented, he did not go to the office the next morning; but buying a book, he spent the day in this café and that, seated in a quiet corner, reading, musing, smoking.

He wanted to do something worth while. He was tired of writing gossip. Only he did not know just what he wanted to do.

The day passed, a golden alcoholic dream, and he asked himself if this was what he wanted to do—to shirk always the task at hand, and, hidden in a tavern from the taskmaster, to drink his life away?

"I am unreliable," he murmured as, late at night, he walked homeward, his book under his arm. "I lack stability," he said. "I lack ambition."

For a while, in his lonely room, he sat by the window in the dark. "I'll come to a bad end," he said.

A carriage halted across the way. The doors of the great house were flung open. The girl hastened in her white garments up the steps; he saw her for a moment in the clear light of the hall; she stood before a mirror, laughing, her white hands uplifted to her yellow hair. Then the doors swung to again, shutting him out in the dark.

"If I knew a girl like that . . ." he said. "If I could tell my fears and troubles to a girl like

John Cave

that. . . . If she would give me a little sympathy, a little counsel . . .”

He sighed. He was lonely and sad. He was afraid.

“What will become of me?”

CHAPTER VIII

THE lake was ten miles long, and up from the water on every side the mountains rose. The mountains were covered with hemlocks, birches, sweet-smelling pines — forests clean and perfumed wherein dwelt multitudes of deer. Sometimes a deer, venturing forth, would be seen upon a quiet lane. John, yesterday, had found one swimming far out, and he had followed it in his canoe. He had drawn near it, despite its terrified zigzagging. He could have touched the beautiful, frantic creature with his paddle.

About the lake there was something mysterious and frightening. Shut in by all those lofty mountains, it lay at their feet too still, too deep, too cold, too clear. The young man, skimming in his canoe over its surface of glass, would grow dizzy if he looked down, for through the transparent water he could see the bottom to a depth of thirty or forty feet, and he would feel as though there were nothing at all between him and the granite rocks, grey striped with white, below — he would feel as though he were looking over a precipice.

John Cave

But only in a few places the bottom of the lake could thus be seen, for nearly everywhere were incredible depths, and down there, it was said, in water incredibly cold, lived fish that, if they ventured to the surface, died.

He had come here for his vacation because he had heard the girl came here. A week was now past, but, though he saw her every day, he had not yet met her. He was a little timid about meeting her. He feared she would be disappointed in him.

Sometimes, on blazing August afternoons, she passed him in her white launch, erect at the wheel, her hair and her apparel blown backward by the wind, her eyes intent on something far off. Sometimes, in the still splendour of the sunset, she passed him in her shining canoe of sapphire blue, paddling with the lightest, deftest touch through water like liquid gold. Sometimes she passed him walking in the quiet lanes; the birch-trees bent in an arch above her head, the sunlight filtered through the leaves, and, her spaniel capering beside her, she came in her white dress down a path dappled with yellow and blue. She was always dressed in white, and she never seemed to see him till the last moment. At the last moment, lifting her pale lids, she would meet roguishly the gaze wherein he tried to express the most respectful admiration, and the suspicion of a smile would flit across her lips.

John Cave

He met her at last.

He sat on the porch of the post-office, waiting for the mail. On the lake below a launch appeared, hers. She reached the landing, disembarked with her spaniel, ascended the hill, and giving him a fluttering glance, perhaps smiling faintly — he could never be quite sure — she entered the post-office, a mail bag of brown leather in her hand.

Two canoes, one red, the other yellow, rounded Garnet Point and glided shoreward in the great sunshine with the quiet grace of swans. From them a girl and three young men disembarked, each carrying a brown leather mail bag.

Four launches, a noisy motor boat, half-a-dozen canoes and a yawl one by one discharged at the pier young men and girls: a hatless, bare-armed, white-clad crew that ascended the hill with noisy laughter, swinging mail bags of brown leather.

These young people filled the office and the porch. Rich cottagers' sons and daughters, comely and brown in their white dress, they liked to come for the mail: they made this hour the gayest of their day: and though the mail they got was usually small and unimportant, all carried large, handsome bags, in which it was odd to see them locking the most trivial things — a newspaper, a post card, an advertisement. But it was *de rigueur* at Sunapee to carry a mail bag, just as it is *de rigueur* at Cape

John Cave

May for the young men, after the bath, to dry the girls' hair in the sun.

Lonely amongst that gay band, John Cave sat on a soap box reading. The young girl's gentle spaniel dozed at his feet. A superb electric launch appeared off Garnet Point, and everyone exclaimed:

"It's Hogan." . . . "The diamond king is coming." . . . "Look at Hogan, the liver pill man." . . . "Hogan, the diamond king."

And soon, blazing with diamonds, a short, stout young man ascended the hill, a white bull terrier at his heels.

The spaniel awoke. Running forth, it frisked and gambolled about the terrier, eager for a frolic. The terrier stopped and stiffened. And suddenly the peace of the midsummer morning was shattered with hideous cries.

All conversation ceased, and all, in startled silence, turned in unison towards that formidable uproar.

The two dogs writhed together. They did not fight. The terrier only tried to get a grip. The spaniel only held its head very high and howled.

Smiling nervously, the young people crowded about the dogs. They were rather amused, for they had never seen a bull terrier fighting.

John Cave stood on his soap box. The spaniel angered him. He thought it held its head high in

John Cave

air because it was beside itself with fear. He did not know that the poor, clamouring little dog, wiser than he, threw back its head so oddly, even rearing up at times on its hind legs, in order to prevent the terrier from getting a throat grip. He did not know that the spaniel's life, that throat grip once secured, would not have been worth a pinch of roadside dust.

Suddenly the hideous din redoubled. It took on a tragic note. And lo, both dogs were red with blood.

A young girl ran staggering from the throng, her hands over her ears, and sank in a soft white heap on the porch floor.

The terrier had got now a firm hold on the spaniel's foreleg near the shoulder, and, all the muscles of its powerful little body taut, it gnawed and shook the flesh with revolting and incredible ferocity. Blood dripped from the corners of its mouth on to the white road. Already the spaniel's leg was like a piece of raw beef.

Young women ran to and fro frantically. "Oh, stop it! Stop it!" they cried.

Young men hurried here and there in a helpless way. They demanded pepper, ammonia, lighted cigars. One of them charily took the terrier by the collar and tried to drag it off; but it held fast, gnawing and shaking the wounded leg the harder,

John Cave

and, drag it where he would, it always drew the hapless spaniel with it.

His hands red and wet, the young man desisted. His face was pale, and as he rose he smiled sadly. "It's no use," he said. "The sooner it's all over now the better."

Another young man appeared with a stout oaken stick. He had a confident air. "Stand back!" he cried. And he gripped the stick with both hands and knitted his brows in a capable way, like a batsman. A sigh of relief, of hope, went up.

Then — bang, bang, bang — a rain of blows descended.

"Don't kill him!" cried a voice. "He's a registered dog."

Bang, bang, bang — the blows fell all the harder. But it was difficult to hit the writhing terrier. As often as not the stick lighted on the spaniel or on the ground. And, when it did strike true, it had no other effect than to cause the terrier to gnaw and shake with redoubled fury the leg that now resembled a ragged bone.

The spaniel seemed to have grown faint and limp. Still, though, it continued to hold its head high, and whenever the alert terrier dropped for an instant the leg to essay the throat, it still escaped by rearing up.

This spaniel, whilst slowly being killed on that

John Cave

beautiful midsummer morning, wore a grotesque air of amazement and reproach as it was flung and tossed about. And continually it directed towards the delicious, tender and gay blue of the sky its horrid cries, its sorrowful and tragic prayer.

The oaken stick broke, and John Cave ran into the post-office for pepper. Hither, in their horror, the young women had all retreated. They crouched in strained attitudes, weeping hysterically, their fingers in their ears; and in answer to their looks of inquiry he shook his head.

"I want some pepper," he said.

But the pepper was useless. It only stimulated the bull terrier. And as the young man rose from his kneeling posture, Hogan, scowling in his face, cried:

"Do you want to blind him?"

"I'd kill him if I had a gun," Cave retorted. And suddenly, inflamed with rage, he clutched Hogan's shoulders with both hands and shook him, shouting:

"Pull off that dog of yours!"

Hogan jerked loose. "Well, give us a chance," he said sullenly.

He stooped and took his indomitable terrier by the tail. He dragged it, and the spaniel with it, up and down the road. He lifted it high in air, and the spaniel, too, was lifted up. He swung

John Cave

to and fro that hideous, writhing, howling pendulum, from which dripped blood.

"No use," he said at the end. There was almost a note of satisfaction in his voice.

The druggist pushed through the crowd with a quart bottle of ammonia under his arm.

"Don't use that stuff," cried Hogan.

The druggist hesitated, but John Cave seized Hogan and flung him back into the crowd.

"Get the hell out of the way!"

"Who's got a gun?"

"What kind of a brute are you, any way, to keep such a dog?"

Amid all that hostility Hogan became silent, and the druggist, kneeling, poured his ammonia on the terrier. He poured the entire quart on its head, into its mouth, into its eyes. All gasped, so powerful were the fumes, and yet their sole effect on the bulldog was to make it gnaw and shake the spaniel's leg more savagely than ever.

"There's no hope," said a voice.

"Bernard's gone for a gun," said another voice.

"The sooner it's over the better," said a third voice.

"The spaniel began it," shouted Hogan.

Without cessation the spaniel uttered its sickening cries. Without cessation the terrier gnawed and shook it. The crowd about the dogs increased con-

John Cave

tinually. The air was harsh with ammonia fumes.

The spaniel's luckless owner had come forth again. She stood, very pale, with her back to the hideous struggle, her eyes closed, and her fingers stopping her ears. The postmistress patted her shoulder, then cried fiercely:

"Isn't there one of you that's man enough to stop this?"

"It was the spaniel's fault," retorted Hogan.

John took up a block of granite bigger than his head. He knelt beside the dogs, balancing the stone with both hands opposite his face. He waited, watched his chance, and suddenly brought down the heavy granite block on the terrier's back with all his might.

The little dog fell on its side at once. Death was instant.

Congratulations were showered on the young man, but Hogan, stooping to take up the dead dog, cursed him roundly.

"You brute," he said, "I'll get even with you." He put the little white terrier under his arm and set off down the hill. "What a brute," he muttered, in a bitter and sad tone.

All the way down the hill he kept looking back and shouting curses at John Cave, while he absently hitched up higher the little, limp, white burden under his arm.

John Cave

"Please let me thank you," said a deep voice.

He turned, bowing, and she gave him her hand.

"My name is Diana Scarlett," she said. "But where is poor Peter?"

"Peter?"

"Yes, Peter — my spaniel."

The druggist had seen Peter starting homeward: a small, black object on the long white road, limping slowly, and emitting with each limp a little howl.

CHAPTER IX

DIANA had told him that he must not fail to go salmon fishing with Jake, an old man who lived alone in the forest by the lakeside.

He found Jake in the evening at his cabin door, seated on a wooden chair, fanning himself vigorously with a palm-leaf fan. When he heard footsteps, the old man cocked his head in a woodland, deerlike way, and through the leaves his eyes met John's in a friendly look.

"Good evenin'," he said, in a powerful and energetic voice.

"Good evening," said John. "I'd like to go salmon fishing with you."

"Well, I guess ye kin," said Jake. "But I start out mighty early. I start, b'gorry, at four o'clock. How does that time suit yee?"

"Very well," said John. "Suppose I go to-morrow."

"All right," said Jake.

In the morning at four, though the sun was already up, in the shadow of the mountains the lake lay dark and still. It was cold. Everything slept.

John Cave

The dew-drenched pine forests exhaled an incredible fragrance.

Jake's boat was heavy, wide, flat-bottomed, as comfortable and safe as a parlour. The old man put John in the stern, took the oars, and, robust as a youth, rowed out through the still, dark water to the Hedgehog.

"This here's my buoy," he said, as he fastened the boat to a ramshackle buoy of rotten wood. "It's a good one, I tell yee."

He bustled about, brisk and hopeful, overhauling the rods, examining the worms that wriggled in their box of clean moss.

"The wind's right," he said. "The moon's right—it's the new of the moon. There's just enough ripple. As like as not ye'll ketch a salmon to-day."

He took up a tiny hook, smaller than a bent pin, baited it with a shred of worm, and lowered it—down, down, down—ninety feet, a hundred feet.

Holding the line, he sat expectantly a moment. Then:

"I've got him," he said. "I've got him. My first smelt. I'll give him to you."

Up from those cold depths Jake drew a fish the size of his finger, a fish as silvery as a new half-dollar, and he fastened it, alive, on John's hook.

John Cave

"Hurry," he said. "Get it down forty or fifty feet. It will die in the warm water up here."

John, with a live smelt on the end of his line, now began to fish for salmon in fifty feet of water.

"Does Miss Scarlett ever fish with you?" he asked.

"Does she?" said Jake, in his powerful, emphatic voice. "Well, I guess she does. B'gorry, she's a good friend of mine. She netted a ten-pound salmon for me once. We had a circus with that feller, I tell yee. It took us two hours to land him. He pulled us from the harbour all the way to Split Rock."

"Will Miss Scarlett be out to-day?"

"B'gorry," said Jake, "it's hard to tell."

The old man sat in the middle of the boat in an arm-chair. His smelt rod was on his left, his salmon rod on his right. A pail of eggshells stood between his legs, and every little while he would crush a handful of the shells and throw them on the water. They sank slowly, white and sparkling. He said they attracted the fish.

The sun rose in the blue sky. The lake was gay.

"Come, little fishes, come nibble my hook,
I'll be captain and you may be cook,"

Jake sang. He was an ardent fisherman. When he caught two smelt in succession, he said: "I

John Cave

tell yee, where there's smelt there's bound to be salmon." And then, when he got no smelt for an hour or more—"There's salmon below here," he said. "That's what has scared the smelt away."

"Do you work in the winter?" said John.

"Well, I guess I do," the old man answered. "I'm janitor of the Newport town hall. B'gorry, I've been janitor there for twenty-seven years. I understand janitorship, I tell yee. I could go to Boston or New York and make big money."

"How long have you been fishing here?"

"Here in this lake?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, I've been a-fishin' here in this lake forty-seven years."

Suddenly the old man became rigid. He frowned intently at his lancewood rod, the tip of which moved up and down in a slow, odd way, and his tongue protruded.

The tip bobbed smartly, and with a mighty jerk Jake rose to his feet. The reel hummed. The rod bent in a circle. With the spry movements of a boy the old man hastened to the bow and set the boat loose from its fastening.

The boat moved southward, towed by the fish upon Jake's line. This fish, for two hours, keeping deep down, fought. It carried the boat three miles. Then, exhausted, it came to the surface, big-

John Cave

shouldered, bull-like, sulky, and finally Jake netted it — a fifteen-pound salmon.

John caught a salmon late in the afternoon. His was a smaller fish. It came to the surface at once, and the warm water there soon tired it. In twenty minutes it was landed.

"When they come up, ye see," said Jake, "they're done for. It's too hot for 'em. For, b'gorry, they're used to water of thirty degrees. It's colder than ice down there. I tell yee, it's so cold that when a drowned person once sinks down the body don't never rise ag'in."

"Is this land-locked salmon good eating?"

"Good-eatin'? Well, I guess 'tis. It's rich as an old Jew."

The sky was unspeakably brilliant. The world was as clean and sweet as a flower. Here and there vast shadows, the shadows of great mountains, lay upon the sun-drenched landscape.

A canoe rounded the point, guided by a girl in white. It drew near in a light and silent way; and the girl waved her hand and called:

"What luck?"

"Two salmon," John shouted.

She ran the canoe alongside skilfully, and John took hold of the gunwale. He asked her if he might get in. She laughed and assented, and he boarded the slim craft clumsily, taking the bow seat.

John Cave

"Good-bye," he said to Jake.

"Good-bye," Jake answered, in a sullen voice.

The canoe swam shoreward, gliding slowly through the crystal water, over a bottom of snow-white sand.

"How is Peter?" said the young man.

"He will pull through," Diana answered. "His eyes are hurt, and he is horribly torn in a half-dozen places. But the doctor says he will pull through."

"You paddle beautifully."

"Do you think so? But then I have canoed on Sunapee ever since I was a little child. How do you like it here?"

"I love it here," said he. "It is such a clean country — such a wild, clean, pure country."

"You will be sorry to go back, then?"

"Sorry? Rather!"

"You like your work, though?"

"Like it? I hate it."

"Why?"

"Because I don't get on well, I suppose."

"Are you lazy?" she asked gravely.

He laughed. "Dear knows!"

The canoe floated out of the shade into an open space. A cool air was blowing. Sunbeams, striking through the shallows, danced on the bottom of white sand like gold coins. The water rippled over

John Cave

this dimpled, snowy sand. The canoe bobbed gaily on the little waves.

"I must go in," said Diana.

"Oh, must you go in?"

They drew near her landing slowly.

"It was odd to meet you here," she said.

"Do you remember seeing me in town?"

"Yes."

"Well," he said, in a low voice, "it isn't odd that I am here. I came here because I knew that you were here."

She made an exclamation. Was it of annoyance? Was it of surprise? He could not tell.

"One of the maids where I live told me that you came here in the summer," he said. "So I came here in the hope of meeting you."

His tone was a little bitter. He feared that she did not like him, that it displeased her to hear him speak in this way.

But after he had helped her out of the canoe she looked in his face for a moment, and her beautiful eyes met his in a timid questioning.

"I hope you will come and see me," she said.

"To come will make me happy," said the young man.

CHAPTER X

As he sat on the hotel piazza with his cigarette that night, delicate sensations of delight rippled through his being. He felt again upon him Diana's timid and questioning glance. Her glance had suffused him with a languid, poetic, somewhat mournful happiness. How pathetically humble, pathetically in his power, the young girl had seemed. And afterwards there had ensued a long silence. Then, when she invited him to come and see her, she had heaved a little sigh.

Lighting a fresh cigarette, he smiled. He looked up at the soft splendour of the starry August sky, and his smile was the complacent smile, the silly and despicable smile, of the male who has made a conquest. He perceived that he would have a pleasant time here from now on.

He came down beaming the next morning, clad for the first time in his new white flannels. He ate an even heartier breakfast than usual—strawberries, porridge, ham and eggs, buckwheat cakes, coffee, and, to conclude, two doughnuts, huge and light and hot, which he dipped in a sauce of melted

John Cave

maple sugar. At the end, puffing a little, he rose, loosened his belt, boarded his canoe, and paddled gaily, if a little heavily, in the direction of Diana's cottage.

But a mile this side of her cottage he passed the young girl. She sat in a handsome launch that, under the direction of a gigantic youth in white, shot by him like the wind. John examined the youth in white carefully. With rolled-up sleeves and shirt open at the neck he stood bareheaded at the wheel, his wind-tossed yellow hair glittering in the sun. He was a cross between a Hercules and an Apollo, and as John, paddling awkwardly, studied him, no vestige of last night's conquering and complacent smile lingered on the journalist's compressed lips.

He returned to the hotel. He bought a newspaper, and passed the morning on the piazza, surrounded by old ladies in rocking-chairs. He read but little. For the most part he gazed, lost in thought, at the mountains, a gloomy and perplexed look on his face.

In the afternoon, with a magazine, he resumed his place among the old ladies again. Suddenly he heard a clatter of hoofs, and Diana and the yellow-haired youth cantered by on beautiful horses, in superb riding clothes, a groom in the rear accentuating all that elegance.

John Cave

"Shirley Brooke," he heard an old lady say.
"The broker's son, you know. Rich? Well!"

Behind his magazine he sneered at his folly. "I have been a fool," he thought. "What did I hope for? Why did I come here? Fool, fool, fool!"

CHAPTER XI

"You should have good luck to-day, miss," said the coachman. "Rain always brings the animals down."

And Diana turned and explained to John that visitors to the great preserve sometimes failed to see a single head of game. Her manner was extraordinarily kind and gentle. She seemed vaguely to know that he was hurt and sore; she seemed to want to console him for something. And smiling back at the young man, she said that though there were thousands of buffalo, deer, elk and wild boar, the preserve was many miles in extent, and the herds in dry weather kept to the distant forests of the mountain heights, where they were inaccessible to the casual visitor. The casual visitor could only hope to see them when they descended, as they did after rain, to the meadows that lay on either side the creek.

She sat on the front seat with the coachman; John was with Mrs. Scarlett behind her, and Shirley Brooke and her cousin, young Reverdy Scarlett, occupied the rear seat of the long buckboard.

John Cave

It had rained all night, but the morning was brilliant. The sky seemed to have been washed, it sparkled with so fresh and pure a blue. The sweet air was almost frosty, the damp pine woods exhaled in the August sun an odour exquisite and exhilarating, and, focussed to the last detail, the grey mountain peaks and crags stood out with an amazing sharpness.

The buckboard rocked on the rough mountain road. The landscape grew wilder and lonelier. Not more than twice or thrice in an hour would they see a house, and these rare houses looked ridiculously small, smaller than toys, amid the tumbled chaos of giant mountains. It was noon before they gained the park.

The park, from without, was nothing but a mountain forest. There was a wooden gate in the tall fence of barbed wire, and beside the gate stood a little frame farmhouse.

A woman from the farm admitted them, and they took a rough forest road. Hardly a minute had passed before Mrs. Scarlett cried, "Oh, look!" and three beautiful deer, yellow as gold, burst from the green gloom of the thicket, crossed the road with incredibly long, light leaps, and in an instant disappeared in the thicket on the other side.

The road turned, passing a dead pine wood. The slender and denuded trees stood erect and still

John Cave

and grey. The ground was covered with a grey carpet of pine needles. Through the interlaced and bare boughs not a breath of air, not a ray of sunlight, ever penetrated. Strangely beautiful in its clean, sad silence was this pine wood, dead and grey, with its innumerable slim, straight trunks ascending like columns in a dim cathedral.

The road turned again, and in a green and sun-drenched meadow, in the shadow of a birch, they saw a doe standing with two little fawns. The animals, in a pose of wild and timid grace, allowed the carriage to come so near that the excursionists saw their soft, frightened eyes, their sleek coats of pale yellow, their tails, mere tufts of white cotton: then, with great, free leaps, they fled.

Diana turned to John and smiled.

"How clean and sweet they are," she said.

The buckboard drew up beside a spring, and, seated on the perfumed grass of a wind-swept knoll, their lunch spread on a granite boulder, they ate and drank with a good appetite. Then the ladies went for a little walk, and the young men, lighting their cigarettes, sprawled on the turf, and boasted and argued.

The ladies returned, the coachman brought up the buckboard, and the excursionists followed once more the rough forest trail. Reverdy and Shirley continued to argue and boast on the back seat, but

John Cave

John, seated now beside Diana, listened no longer.

The buckboard made a sharp turn, and the horses reared and halted. A little more, and they would have fallen on a huge buffalo cow that lay in the road. On all sides were buffaloes, a herd of a hundred or more. The meadow was black with them. And they were not at all afraid. They looked at the carriage with dull eyes, and the cow in the road rose lazily.

"Isn't it dangerous?" said Mrs. Scarlett.

The coachman laughed. "Oh, no, ma'am; there's no danger," he said.

The buckboard advanced slowly. The herd, for some reason, closed in behind and followed it.

"Faster, please," said Mrs. Scarlett. "These brutes make me nervous."

But there was another turn, and again the horses stopped and reared, and Mrs. Scarlett screamed faintly. This time the road was blocked by some twenty or thirty buffaloes, standing and lying, huge, stolid, formidable brutes.

"We'd better turn back," said Reverdy Scarlett, in a strange voice.

"I'm going to jump out," said Mrs. Scarlett, clasping the coachman's arm.

"Sit still, madam," said the coachman. He was smiling, a puzzled smile. The buffaloes, not more

John Cave

than a dozen feet ahead, made no movement to clear the way; they did not even deign to look at the excursionists.

"Turn back," repeated Reverdy. And then, glancing behind him, the young man muttered: "Heavens, we can't turn back!"

For the buffaloes that they had passed had closed in on them more closely, blocking the roadway in the rear. The buffaloes in front continued motionless. And from behind, now and then, a great beast swaggered past with sullen looks.

They were surrounded by buffaloes. They could reach out on every side and touch a buffalo. It was a novel experience. It was even alarming.

"I hardly know . . ." said the coachman, smiling his puzzled smile. "They ain't supposed to be dangerous except in the spring." He flicked the horses, but they backed and reared, refusing to advance.

And there they sat, surrounded by buffaloes.

"Well," said Diana, "what are we to do?"

The coachman, busy with his frightened horses, stammered:

"I hardly know if . . ."

"Shall we get out and go for them?" asked Shirley Brooke tremulously.

"You don't want to make 'em mad," said the coachman.

John Cave

"Oh, dear, we must do something," whimpered Mrs. Scarlett.

John Cave, pale and silent, sat beside Diana, lost in thought. Here was a superb chance for him to distinguish himself in the eyes of the girl he loved; but had he the courage to grasp this chance? He pondered the question cautiously. Would the buffaloes, if he rushed upon them yelling, disperse? . . . Suppose, instead of dispersing, they attacked him, gored and trampled him to death? Well, it would be better to die like that than to turn and run. . . . But he knew that he would turn and run at the first sign of opposition on the buffaloes' part. Yes, in fancy he saw himself running frantically, his coat-tails streamed out level in the wind, and with a sad and contemptuous smile Diana watched him disappear over the hill.

Suddenly he leaped from the buckboard and rushed at the buffaloes as an angry gardener rushes at a flock of trespassing hens.

"Hi!" he shouted, at the top of his lungs, waving his arms, darting this way and that. "Hi! Get out! Scoot!"

He was utterly terrified. But he advanced bravely.

"Hi! Hi!"

The sleepy brutes in front, rising slowly, lumbered off at a heavy trot. A black bull glared at

John Cave

the young man, lowered his head, pawed the ground; but John rushed at him with a wild yell, and he, too, sullenly took to his heels.

"Hi! Scoot!" they all shouted together from the buckboard. And faster and faster the buffaloes retreated. Soon not one was to be seen.

.

Diana and John, on the return, got out at the foot of the Newport hill to relieve the tired horses. Alone at last, they both were silent. But they walked slowly, and the carriage forged ahead.

"I am going back to town to-morrow," said the young man.

"You must come and see me in town," said she.

Her walk had a free and gentle grace. Her hair glittered in the sunshine like gold thread. The delicate regularity of her profile gave her a proud, contemptuous air.

At a steep place carpeted with pine needles he took her hand to help her. Afterwards, the carriage having turned a bend, he did not release her hand.

She made no effort to withdraw it. She continued to advance in silence, an inscrutable look in her clear eyes.

"Diana," he said, in a tremulous voice, "I have told you why I came to Sunapee."

John Cave

She gave him a swift, timid glance. "Are you glad you came?"

"Yes, if you are. Are you?"

"Yes," she said.

He halted before her. "Dearest, dearest," he murmured. Bending over her, he took her face in his hands.

As frankly as a child she gave him her fresh lips.

He was profoundly moved. He felt vile and coarse beside this beautiful girl. How strange, how sad, that she should stoop to one like him.

But in the soil of his polluted youth such creditable thoughts soon died. His humble look was succeeded by the complacent smile of conquest. Then, as he walked on beside Diana again, he began to find the silence awkward. He held her hand. Should he release it? . . . or what? And he began to wonder if he should go further. . . . Did she desire him to go further? . . . He directed on the pure, grave profile of the young girl a side-long glance of vile suspicion.

And Diana, without looking at him, said, as if in answer to his thoughts:

"No one ever kissed me before."

His face cleared. The absurdity of his suspicions! As though one should suspect a lily or a rose! Releasing her hand, he stammered:

"Some things are very difficult to say. . . . But

John Cave

when one has a salary so small that it will hardly support one's self, and when one must sleep all day and work all night . . . why, one is hardly . . . hardly in a position to . . . a position to . . ."

As he faltered, blushing furiously, the young girl turned to him with a serene smile.

"But there is always hope," she said.

She smiled serenely, but on her cheek glistened a tear. Not thus, perhaps, had she dreamed her lover would come to her: a youth with polluted eyes, extending empty hands too weak for her support, and at the same time searching her with glances of vile suspicion.

CHAPTER XII

PETER TO JOHN CAVE

MY DEAR BENEFACTOR,—I know you will be pleased to hear that my wounds are nearly healed. Even from the foreleg, which suffered most, the soreness is now gone. But the limp remains.

I send you an ash-tray of birch bark that my mistress made for you at my request.

Hoping to see you often on my return to town,
I will now close.

PETER.

(Dictated.)

JOHN CAVE TO DIANA SCARLETT

I am sitting by the window from which, so often, I saw you last winter. I did not dare to hope then that you would ever be my friend.

You ask me what I do and what I think. Such questions are difficult to answer. However ——

My breakfast is not over till eleven. After breakfast, with newspapers and a book, I sit in the Park an hour or two.

At one, a little nervous, I go to the office.

I am always worried over my coming assignment.

John Cave

Will it be a good, amusing assignment, or a stupid one? Usually, thanks to the managing editor, it is good, and in gathering my facts and in writing a column or a column and a half of copy the afternoon and evening pass.

Pleasantly and swiftly they pass, and at half-past nine or ten my work is done. Now, till midnight, I am idle. But what is there to do? It is too late for the theatres, too late to go and see anyone (if I knew anyone to go and see), and so, since I must be amused, I do the thing that is cheapest, handiest; and with two or three other men from the office I sit in a café, smoking, talking, drinking.

We have a good time in the café. We talk of serious things—the books we like, the plays we like, our future work, our ambitions—and, our brains stimulated by alcohol, we think and speak freely and profoundly—or, at least, we fancy we do—though to an outsider it might seem that we are only noisy braggarts.

As to that I can't say, but at any rate our long hours in the café would do us no harm were it not that, the next morning, we awake unrefreshed. The head aches a little, the eyes smart, the mind is fatigued and sad: one is really fit for nothing but to spend the day in bed.

And sometimes that is what I do. The morning after one of these splendid evenings, evenings that

John Cave

we end almost reverently, with deep stirrings of joy and gratitude, separating as priests separate at the close of a successful rite, I send word to the office that I am ill, and all day I doze in my room. It is shameful — I am paid for this idleness — I am a thief.

And like a thief I hide in my room, afraid to go out lest some *Press* man see me. And the next day, when I report for work again, I am hideously frightened and abased; I am convinced that, if the cause of my absence is not known, it is at least suspected.

Sometimes, too, our evenings at the café do not terminate in a quiet dispersal at one o'clock; but from weak we turn to strong drinks, and the night grows wild and confused, and one awakes in the morning, as like as not, with only thirty or forty cents to see one through the balance of the week. Then, day after day, borrowing from this man to buy one's luncheon, from that man to buy one's dinner, obliged to tell various small creditors that one has not the dollar or two necessary to settle their trifling accounts. . . . Oh, how can I still continue in this life when I suffer so horribly the humiliation of it?

Now, perhaps, you know me better. I want you, if you wish it, to know me thoroughly. But maybe,

John Cave

after this frank letter, you will decide that you do not want to know me at all. J. C.

DIANA SCARLETT TO JOHN CAVE

MY DEAR JOHN,— I have thought about your letter a great deal. You tell me that you are sometimes happy and sometimes wretched. You are wretched when you are doing things that are wrong — drinking and all that — and you are happy when you are doing what is right: you are happy when you are at work.

I am sure you could be always happy.

At night, after you are done at *The Press*, instead of talking about your future and your ambitions, why don't you go home and work?

Good-bye. Shirley is whistling for me from his launch. DIANA SCARLETT.

JOHN CAVE TO DIANA SCARLETT

DEAR DIANA,— For a month I have drunk nothing, and delightful is the sense of freedom that this abstinence gives. I am like a prisoner released from his chains.

Drinking: the infernal practice was always on my mind. Every morning, from the moment I left home, I worried over how much I would drink before returning, when I would take my first drink,

John Cave

whether or no I might get through the day without drinking at all. Like a chain, the habit continually galled me. And now I am free.

Mentally I have this delightful sense of freedom, and physically I abound in health and high spirits, like an animal. I eat so well, I sleep so well, I get up in the morning so refreshed and happy — thanks to you.

Assuredly I don't hope to continue a journalist for ever. I want to write plays. How many plays I have commenced! But I have never so much as finished a one-act curtain raiser.

But now I am back again at a play I began three years ago. I worked two mornings and two evenings on it this week. A playwright will sometimes make a quarter of a million dollars from one success.

When I was a boy at school I continually distinguished myself. As soon as I became a young man, I continually disgraced myself.

You see, as a boy, I lived in intimate relationship with my teachers. I liked and respected these teachers; they liked and respected me; and in order to please them, in order to retain their good opinion, I worked hard. I hated work, but it was necessary: otherwise my teachers would be grieved.

But as a young man I have had no friends of this kind. My friends have been young like me, and

John Cave

their influence has led me towards dissipation rather than towards work. Because no one cared whether I worked or not, I stopped working.

You now stand in the place of one of those teachers of my boyhood. If I can but be sure that you care, I will work my very hardest. To please you, I will work as I did when a little chap. But do you care?

J. C.

DIANA SCARLETT TO JOHN CAVE

DEAR JOHN,—This is regatta week, and you mustn't expect a letter from me. But of course I care. Now I must dress for the canoe tilts.

DIANA.

CHAPTER XIII

PRUDENCE, the maid told him, was at home. He had not seen her for two months, and, seated in a low praying-chair from a chapel of Finistère, he dreamily regarded the beauty of her library.

The walls were panelled to the ceiling in time-blackened oak carved in a Gothic pattern. The chairs, all old, all of dark wood richly sculptured, were upholstered in cherry-coloured satin. In the well-waxed floor one could see one's face as in the rosewood surface of a grand piano, and beautiful beyond words on this dark floor were the pale Persian rugs with their blended hues of cream, old rose, jade green.

"It was time you came to see me," said a clear young voice, and Prudence, in street dress, gave him her hand gaily.

"Oh, well," said he. He noted absently her pal-lor.

"'Oh, well'! Well, what?"

"You didn't care."

"Of course I cared."

"When you wrote and asked me for those stories, you didn't press me very hard to come."

John Cave

"I wanted to surprise you," she said softly. She put her hands to her hat, withdrawing the long gold pins, and in this charming attitude she paused and smiled.

"A surprise, eh?" He concealed a yawn behind his hand.

"Yes. A surprise."

She set a huge tin case of cigarettes before him, Egyptian cigarettes, gold-tipped, aromatic, and as large as small cigars.

"Would you mind," he faltered, "giving me a drink, too?"

Silently, a little reproachfully, she got out the whisky and soda-water. He drank of the exhilarating mixture, and a warm wave of physical well-being, almost of happiness, flowed through his veins sluggish and foul from a week's drunkenness. He fell into a muse. . . .

Diana had broken with him on account of his jealousy. He had suspected that she took an actual delight in making him jealous. But he had been wrong there. No girl, she had assured him, was cruel enough to delight in making her lover jealous. True, perhaps. . . . But he could not banish his morbid and ignoble doubts, they turned his happiness to despair, and therefore she had broken with him sorrowfully. . . . Drink, after his long abstinence, had had a strange, revolting taste. . . .

John Cave

"Wake up," said Prudence.

He looked at her and smiled. "How about that surprise?"

She knelt upon the opposite praying-chair, resting her elbows on the sculptured bar that topped the back. Her air was quaintly serious and business-like.

"You don't like *The Press*, do you?" she began.

"I loathe the hole," said he.

"How would you like to go to New York?"

"And starve?"

"Would you go if you could get a good place?"

"Oh, I suppose so."

She rose and stood before him.

"Well, I've got you a good place."

"You? How?" He looked incredulous, amazed, pleased.

"Those stories of yours . . . I sent them over to Miles."

John paced the room. "What did he say?"

She laughed at his excitement: a sweet and sympathetic laugh.

"He said they were fine. He wants a man like you for his Sunday magazine. He wants you to come over and see his Sunday editor next week."

"Why," said John, "that would mean a hundred a week. Prudence! . . ."

John Cave

He strode to the table, drained his glass, and lighted a cigarette, chuckling.

"Prudence!"

"Well?"

He took her hands. "How pretty and good you are."

"Good? I?" She laughed oddly.

"I have always known that you were good."

He regarded her with tender pity. Then, suddenly, he turned away, forgetting her in his own affairs again, and with his back to her he mixed himself another whisky and soda, laughing, making little joyous exclamations.

"Of course you'll take the place, won't you?" she said.

He approached her, the glass in his hand.

"Your health," he said. "How can I thank you?"

"Have I really helped you?"

"Helped me? . . . Show me Miles's letter, will you?"

"I'll run and get it. Then we'll take a walk. Would you like that?"

"Yes, indeed."

She brought him the letter, and he read it while she put on her hat and gloves. It was flattering enough; it seemed sincere enough. . . .

"Give me a cigarette," said Prudence suddenly.

John Cave

And she sank into a chair. She was yawning in the oddest way: great yawns that succeeded one another with scarcely an intermission. And amid these yawns she smoked her cigarette ravenously; not as women usually do, taking the smoke into the mouth and blowing it forth again at once, but with profound inhalations, drawing it deep down into her lungs. And still the yawns continued.

"How pale you are," said John suspiciously.

"Am I?"

"Yes. I noticed it from the first."

Flushing beneath his unkind look, she rose hurriedly.

"You must excuse me a few minutes," she said, and yawning, smiling, in an embarrassment that was rather pitiable, she hastened from the room. As the door closed he shouted after her in a portentous voice:

"I know what you are going to do."

Then, awaiting her return, he mused, the letter open before him, his glass and cigarette at hand. . . . This help was strangely opportune, for he had not worked since the night Diana broke with him, and his place on *The Press* was doubtless lost for good. . . . How low, but for this help, might he not have fallen? . . .

In New York it would be easier to forget. He seemed to be forgetting. In the end he would for-

John Cave

get. But there were times when the memory of Diana caused him intolerable pain. . . .

He sniffed. A peculiar odour floated in little puffs into the room: a bitter, acrid odour. He frowned. Then his troubled glance fell upon the letter, and reading it again, he smiled.

But that acrid odour, billowing in noiselessly, filled the room now, and, sniffing and frowning, he went to Prudence's door and called:

"Hurry up! I can't wait here all day!"

When she rejoined him, beautiful in her sables, neither spoke of her odd seizure. They went out at once into the bright sunshine and the dry, cold air of a November day.

They walked up and down Peanut Street, regarding the shop-windows' meagre display, regarding the costumes, too coarse and cumbersome, of the women, regarding the young men with their unshaven faces, their untidy boots, and their dusty coats ridiculously padded.

"A village," said John. "An overgrown village. I'll be glad to get out of here."

"There isn't much life here," said the young girl listlessly.

They took tea at an empty café, they dined at another empty café, and after dinner they visited a vaudeville theatre — a long and dreary performance, nineteen numbers, seventeen of them bad.

John Cave

At last they were on Peanut Street again.

"Now what shall we do?"

"I don't know."

It was eleven, and Peanut Street was as gloomy and still as a cemetery path. The voices of the young couple resounded strangely in the silent night, and when a rare pedestrian approached, the thunder of his footfalls, augmenting as he drew near, dying as he departed, was audible a square away. Now and then, when they passed a police officer, the man regarded them suspiciously.

"Come to the Westminster," said John, "and we'll drink a bottle of champagne to my new job."

"Oh, no," said Prudence, fretfully. "You drink too much."

"Don't you talk!" said he. He gave her a sour look. She seemed uneasy and cold, seemed to want to be rid of him. "Have you an appointment?" he asked.

"Yes."

"What is it for?"

"I'm going to take supper at twelve o'clock in Chinatown."

"I'll go with you," he said gruffly.

"You may if you like."

"You need looking after."

His tone was gruff, but its significance was clear to her, and she said meekly, gratefully:

John Cave

"Yes, do come."

They went to the Westminster after all. From a little corner table they stared through the smoke at the energetic orchestra and the handful of languid listeners. They sipped their icy and sharp wine.

"I told you that you'd get the habit," said John.

With downcast eyes she played with the stem of her glass. There was a long silence. She made a little grimace. "It's not much of a habit," she said.

"You're very pale."

"I wasn't well all summer."

"Of course you weren't. And you know why."

He threw back his head to drain the last drop of his wine. She regarded him with a sneer, and, as he wiped his wet mouth, she said:

"My habit is no worse than yours."

"Oh, isn't it?" he retorted. "Oh, but it is, though. I can stop. You can't."

A frown, worried and frightened, ruffled the serenity of her pale and beautiful brow, and she faltered:

"Maybe, when you go to New York, I'll come over there, too . . . and you'll help me, and I'll help you . . . to give up . . ."

"I'll be glad to help you, dear," he said. He laid his hand on hers. "We'll help one another."

There followed a space of serious silence. Each

John Cave

debated whether or no the appointment should be kept in Chinatown. Each felt, after that little talk, extremely virtuous and solemn. At the same time . . .

“ Shall we go to Chinatown or not ? ” said he.

She hesitated, smiling. Then, “ Suppose we do,” she said impulsively. “ And to-morrow, a new leaf.”

CHAPTER XIV

THE Chinese restaurant had a dingy exterior. The dark, bare hall reeked with unpleasant odours. The stairway they ascended was drab with dirt.

But at the top of the stairway a wide door opened upon a clean and spacious kitchen brilliantly lighted, and there, over huge fires, over great pans of gleaming copper, four or five neat Chinese cooks worked quickly and quietly at marble tables piled with white or red or green mounds of food.

"In every Chinese restaurant," John explained, "the kitchen is placed in full view, like this. You inspect the kitchen before you go into the dining-room. You ascertain for yourself the food's quality and the cooks' cleanliness."

"I know," said Prudence.

In the restaurant her friends sat waiting: a half-dozen young men and girls, smoking cigarettes and drinking tea, leaning forward, their sleek heads close together, conversing quietly and earnestly. Pale and thin, with a look of extreme poverty despite the neatness of their dress and the gaiety of their ties and ribbons, they were always to be found

John Cave

conversing excitedly in low tones, for they were always in trouble with the police.

They rose and greeted the new-comers with gentle courtesy, pressing on them superb China tea and execrable Virginia cigarettes. They were profuse with polite attentions, gentle murmurs of welcome, intelligent and sympathetic smiles.

The room was uncarpeted, the tables were without cloths, and here and there a silent Chinaman, his shoes kicked off for comfort's sake, and his feet, in their immaculate white stockings, on the rungs of his stool, ate duck or chicken and tossed the bones beneath him.

The food was good. Bowls of steamed rice as light as foam, served with a rich and highly-seasoned sauce from Shanghai, cold chicken in moist and tender white cubes, ragouts of duck, mushrooms, ham and such-like savoury substances — altogether it made an appetising midnight supper.

And after they had eaten, the little party, leaning back in their chairs, lighted cigarettes and drank more of the delicious tea. Prudence's friends talked of their wrongs. In low and bitter tones they told of the extortions of their landlords, the extortions of the police, the extortions of the detectives of the various leagues for the suppression of vice.

John, knowing that they were regarded by society as a particularly degraded and dangerous

John Cave

criminal type, marvelled at their youth; for the oldest of these girls was not more than eighteen or nineteen, the oldest of these young men was not more than twenty-two or twenty-three. It was sad to see such mere children chained to a horrible vice. . . . But what was the girl in red saying?

"They gave me three months," she said. "I swore I hadn't touched his glasses, but what did my word count for? And it was not till I had served thirty days of my time that I remembered how, in his drunkenness, the glasses had kept falling off his nose, and I had put them out of harm's way in his overcoat pocket. I sent him word to look there for them, and he got me out last Wednesday. He was sorry, oh, very sorry . . . and I had been almost two months in jail."

"Sue him."

But she shook her head. "What's he got?" she said scornfully.

One of the pale young men began to yawn. He yawned and yawned. His friends regarded him with sympathy.

"Have you got your habit on?" said Prudence.

The pale young man smiled apologetically. "I've got my habit."

They prepared at once to depart. They went in sections, fearing to go together on account of the police. Two by two, at intervals of five minutes

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or so, they passed out. John, as he sped with Prudence through the squalid streets, said with a sneer:

“What a lot!”

She frowned impatiently. “Oh, well!”

“Do you see them often?”

“No; not very often.”

And she paused before a mean little house, looked up and down the street, then opened the door and hurriedly drew John in with her. Through a dark hall they stumbled, and, ascending a dark stairway, they entered a room that a gas jet dimly lighted.

The room was hung with flimsy Oriental hangings of yellow and red. There were rickety divans, spears, torn paper parasols, hanging lamps of copper set with stones of coloured glass, stained cushions. Here, at five dollars a head, sightseers from the country occasionally came to watch with awed eyes the smoking of a few pipes.

The young people, talking in low tones, set on the floor in the middle of the room a glittering opium lay-out in a large brass tray. They placed nearby cigarettes, matches, and a basket of fruit. About all that they piled in a great circle the gaudy cushions from the divans. Then, with happy smiles, with little sighs, with low, contented laughter, they lay down.

They lay on the left side, with the right hand and arm free, forming a circle of alternate male and

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female figures. Each young man's head rested on the breast of a girl, while on his own breast in turn a girl's head was pillowed.

John, who had declined to smoke, was bidden to turn off the gas. He did so, and the little lamp of peanut oil cast a faint light, strangely clear, upon the circle of pallid faces.

A girl of seventeen began to cook the pills. She cooked them very quickly — she was famed for her dexterity — rolling them with an odd, skilful movement on the ball of her thumb, which long usage had hardened and stained.

First she served the yawning youth. Tremulous with desire, he smoked six pills in succession. Then, with a tranquil sigh, he lay back on his companion's breast, smiled, lighted a cigarette, and began to talk fluently in subdued tones.

The pipe passed from hand to hand. The smokers each got about four pills an hour. In the intervals of waiting they occupied themselves with fruit and with cigarettes. And like a hive the room hummed with the murmur of their contented voices.

But they grew silent when the cook announced that another pill was ready. They watched with sympathy the youth or girl whose turn it was. The pipe in the stillness emitted its ugly gurgle as the bitter fumes were inhaled. The smoker, satisfied,

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fell back languidly. Then once more the murmured conversation was resumed.

John was ignored utterly. Sullen and drowsy, he sat in the shadow. It annoyed him to see the intimacy that had sprung up between Prudence and one of the young men. . . .

He must have dozed. He started awake as the State House clock struck three. He looked about him wearily. The little lamp of peanut oil threw its clear, faint light on the circle of smokers. The young girl cook rolled the opium pills swiftly. The pipe passed from hand to hand. The low hum of conversation was incessant. Prudence and the pale youth exchanged the tenderest smiles.

Seized with a sudden resolution, he arose.

"My God," he said, in a disdainful and sad voice, "what do you all see in this?"

They smiled without looking up, and Prudence answered drowsily:

"What do you see in getting drunk?"

He gave a mournful laugh. Vice for vice, opium smoking was truly comelier than drunkenness.

But it destroyed too swiftly. . . . These young outcasts would lie here, passing the pipe from hand to hand, till, at nine or ten o'clock in the morning, sleep overcame them. They would awake late in the afternoon, take some strong coffee and some fruit, and then begin to smoke again. So, but for the

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lack of money, they would keep on — a week, two weeks — till they became yellow skeletons with burning eyes. Yellow skeletons, too weak to rise, lying on the gaudy cushions, extending tremulously for the drug a pipestem arm and a hand like a claw, murmuring tenderly to one another absurd and meaningless phrases such as one hears in dreams.

He hastened to the nearest telephone booth and called up *The Press*, asking for the managing editor, who was apt, at this hour, to be in his office alone. Norris's voice came to him over the wire.

"Mr. Norris," said the young man, "this is Cave."

"Well?"

"Is my place still open for me?"

Norris laughed. "Do you think it's best to come back?"

"I have had an offer from Miles," John said. "He likes my stuff. He is willing to try me as a feature writer."

"Good," said Norris.

"But I'd rather come back to you."

Norris laughed again. "All right. Come back," said he.

John returned to Prudence. The youth whose head lay on her breast looked up at her in a childlike way, and interminably his voice flowed on in a monoto-

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nous murmur. With a dreamy smile she listened, her slim fingers moving gently in his dark curls.

John laid his hand on her arm. She started, and her eyes met his in a meaningless stare.

"I am not going to New York," he said.

"New York?"

A shadow of perplexity that came and vanished, and her face regained at once its aspect of exalted and calm joy.

"No; I am not going to New York."

"Well, what is that to me?"

He hastened out into the dreary night. Tired, ill, unkempt, he seemed to be struggling painfully forth from a morass of mental and physical rottenness wherein he had wallowed a long while.

"Diana," he murmured, "save me! I love you, dear Diana. You are my salvation. Come, or I will soon strangle in the foul ooze. . . ."

Feverish and weak, he smiled to hear himself speaking aloud in the empty street.

"No priest loathes pollution more than I, yet at the first failure or sorrow I sink back into the morass as into a warm, soft bed. That is how I am made, and you alone, dear, can save me."

Denied a God, he worshipped a girl. Robbed of a God by modern thought, he prayed to a girl with implicit faith in her goodness and her power to save him.

CHAPTER XV

"I AM a practical person," Diana said. "It is clear, from what you tell me, that these men at *The Press* are your inferiors in talent."

"I should hope so," he interjected.

"But talent," she went on, "isn't everything. There is diplomacy. You despise these men. You abominate their commonplace minds. Well, maybe they dislike you because you have shown them this."

He laughed. "Indeed I have shown them!"

"Of course you can't succeed," said Diana, frowning, "in a nest of enemies."

They were walking in a forest. Dead leaves were falling softly. A scarlet oak leaf caught in her gilt hair.

He stepped behind her, fastened the leaf more firmly in its glistening place, and pressed his lips upon the smooth white flesh of her neck. The flesh of her neck was warm and sweet to his lips. Her hair had a keen and thrilling odour. He closed his eyes. . . . But she drew away gently.

"You can't succeed," Diana repeated, "in a nest of enemies."

"Well, what am I to do?"

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"Do? Make friends."

"It is an ignoble way to succeed," he muttered moodily.

"Why ignoble?"

"Because one wants to succeed through good work alone." He paused, recalling his career at *The Press*. "And yet," he said, "it has not been good work, but complaints about the other men, boasts about myself, that have advanced me so far."

"I am practical," said Diana. "I see clearly that, to succeed, you must work hard in many ways. It will not be enough to do your best over your stories: you must also do your best to make powerful friends and to convince these friends of your extraordinary ability."

Her smile was delicate and arch. How beautiful, how wise she was. Their reconciliation made him incredibly happy. And floating in happiness, as birds float in the perfumed air, the soft, silent, rose-coloured air of a midsummer sunset, he told himself with profound emotion that after their marriage he would be always as happy as this, always, every moment, as happy as this, until death. What would he not do, then, to speed their marriage?

"I'll make friends," he cried. "I'll make the fools worship me."

CHAPTER XVI

HE had on *The Press* but one friend, the managing editor, and sometimes he fancied that he saw in the managing editor's manner a certain coldness. Norris could not but be influenced by the hatred that raged and beat about John Cave's name.

Yes, decidedly, he must make friends.

Collier, the city editor, had seemed to dislike him for a long time. Collier must now be won over. Impossible task!

John, whenever a good idea for a local story came to him, hastened to Collier with it. Collier, a day's grey stubble on his face, a pencil held cross-wise in his mouth like a bit, lay back in his revolving chair as in a bed, his unpolished boots on his desk and a journal open at arm's length before him; and in that reclining attitude he would look up at John, lowering a little his wall of newspaper, and he would listen to the young man's suggestion with his small head, with its crest of stiff hair, cocked, like a parrot's, on one side.

"Well?" John would conclude anxiously. "Well, what do you think of it? It's a good local story, isn't it?"

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The other's hard blue eyes would glitter with malevolence. He would give a harsh, cackling laugh.

"Ha, ha! No, Cave. No, I don't think so. I don't see any story in that. Ha, ha!"

And he would rise slowly. Spreading out his arms to their full length, he would yawn with a violence that lifted him up on tiptoe. "A — a — ah — h — h — g — g — h — h ——"

Then, sinking back into his chair, he would take up languidly again one of the newspapers over which he mooned his life away.

Intelligent, learned, the best of husbands, temperate, regular, Collier as a journalist was worthless for the reason that he disliked his work, which he deemed little better than old women's gossip. Year after year he had hoped to make a change, but the years had flown too fast for him — ten years, twenty years — and while he waited for some pleasanter work, some work worthy of his powers, some work really fitted to his cultivated and fastidious mind, life had passed like a dream. Already he was an elderly man, clinging to his post as a wrecked sailor, alone on a wide sea, clings to a spar. Collier felt himself very much alone, and on the bleak, grey sea he saw no other spars.

It was not strange that he disliked Cave. Cave's ingratitude had hurt him. He had opened the doors

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of *The Press* to Cave, yet the young man had got himself transferred from Collier's to a better, a rival, department; and furthermore he had told a brother reporter, Lawson, that he considered Collier a worthless workman, and Lawson had repeated to Collier those cruel words.

Suspecting something of all this, but hopeful on the whole, John came week after week to the local room with his ideas, which week after week Collier laughed to scorn.

.

He tried to make friends with the editor-in-chief.

Thirty years ago the editor-in-chief had been a typesetter. He owed his success to a bluff toadyism, almost a bullying toadyism.

"Damn you," he would growl, striking the owner on the back, "you're a soft-hearted fool."

And then he would suggest some niggardly retrenchment, the discharge of this man, the doubling of that man's work, which suited but too well the owner's economical mind.

He kept in his desk the dog-eared grammar, written by an unknown ignoramus, that he had conned in the intervals of typesetting in his ambitious youth. That the obscure author of this grammar was without authority meant nothing to

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him; he deemed all grammars, like all Bibles, infallible: and imposing on *The Press* the book's absurd rules, he made it impossible to write there, for example, "When summer comes," but one had to write, "When summer shall have come."

Strange almost to insanity were the ideas of the self-taught old man. At *The Press's* expense he imported from London yearly a dream book and an almanac. The dream book showed the grave significance inherent in every sort of dream—the significance of dreaming of the loss of a tooth, the significance of dreaming of a fall from a high place—and each morning he consulted the volume surreptitiously. The almanac foretold the future, giving lucky and unlucky days, predicting hurricanes and earthquakes; he would undertake no journey or piece of business without going to it secretly for guidance.

John often came to him, often, standing respectfully before his desk, recounted flattering things that had been said of him by the great men of the city; but, though the editor-in-chief would perhaps be pleased, he would glare at his informant suspiciously, and in the silence John, conscious of the dislike and mistrust in the grey, fat, stupid face with its dull and bulging eyes, would withdraw, embarrassed, disappointed. Alas, he had often ridiculed the grammar, the dream book and the

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almanac, and Lawson had hinted something of all that ridicule to the very sensitive old man.

.
The editor-in-chief's son was the Sunday editor, and the eccentricity that Clayton had inherited from his father spent itself on dress — on red waistcoats, on great pearl-coloured sombreros, on lace stockings through which the flesh of instep and ankle gleamed.

Little, thin, sallow, Clayton strutted ridiculously in his gay and outlandish garb. And in his love of changing embellishment, of strange and striking ornament, he even brought his beard into service, wearing now the mild, neat side-whiskers of a clergyman, now a fierce military moustache, and once he was seen with the delicate chin-tuft of a romantic Spanish portrait, and once with the great, fan-shaped beard of a Norse sea-robber spreading superbly over his narrow chest.

Twice a week he visited a manicure parlour where, at a small table opposite a pretty girl, he sat with one thin, yellow, knotted hand in a bowl of rosewater, while the nails of the other hand the young girl trimmed and polished and tinted and perfumed. During that pleasant hour he conversed languidly, his eye roving over the spacious and gay room. There were as many little tables there as in a restaurant, and at each table a young

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man, pale and perfumed, held one hand in a bowl of tepid rosewater, while the pretty operator bent busily over the other, with intimate laughter and coquettish murmurings. . . .

Though he wore an anti-rheumatic ring of iron on his thumb, he suffered not a little from rheumatism of the ankles, and in December, when he lay bed-ridden, John, to win his friendship, visited him, praised his taste, and suggested a half-dozen Sunday stories.

Clayton, unshaven and dishevelled, listened haughtily. He lay on his back in the great bed, a little yellow skeleton in pyjamas of pink silk. The air was heavily scented by a huge bowl of artificial violets, and Clayton's haughty look changed to one of gratification when his sister entered and sprayed the paper flowers with cologne.

"A good idea, that," said John. "Better in some ways than the real thing."

"I think so."

"Well, can you use any of those stories?"

Clayton frowned. He meditated deeply. Then he shook his head.

"No," he said.

And he grew haughtier than ever, suddenly recalling how, in Lawson's hearing, John had ridiculed his brown frock-coat.

.

John Cave

For the literary and dramatic editor he occasionally reviewed a play or a book. Williams accepted that help gladly, but mentioned it to nobody. On the contrary, when he liked one of John's reviews particularly well, he signed his own name to it.

Williams had read everything in the world, and had forgotten nothing of his reading. His fluency was prodigious; words gushed from his tongue and his pen as water gushes from a hose. His articles, which were regarded as works of genius in the office, abounded in such phrases as "quintessential unctuousness."

Williams would have liked to help John, but, as the mainstay of nine children, a wife and two mistresses, he felt that it was his duty to help no one but himself.

.

Williams's assistant, labouring bitterly at his desk, reviewing a dozen novels a day, writing on Monday night criticisms of twenty plays that he had never seen, often looked up from his manuscript to curse his chief.

Thrilled with John's sympathy, he narrated his wrongs. They were the usual wrongs of the underling; he did all the work, Williams got all the pay and all the glory.

But there was more than this, the assistant hinted darkly, and he lighted a cigarette and put his foot

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on his desk, prepared for a comfortable chat. There was more than this. Williams was a grafter. He was paid by the managers to write favourable reviews of poor plays, and he was paid by the publishers to write favourable reviews of poor books. The thing was certain, and the assistant was piling proof on proof. A Peanut Street tobacconist . . . But it would be unwise, at this stage, to go into details. . . . However . . . and a pink flush appeared in the cheeks of the excited young man, and, swearing a tremendous oath, he struck the desk a crashing blow with his small, pale fist.

But just then Williams entered. His look was stern. Had he heard anything? John bent over his manuscript in confusion, and Williams began to dictate slowly — for the assistant did not write shorthand — a criticism studded with such words as “artistry,” “stellar,” and “smutty.”

On his departure the young men smiled at one another with relief. Williams had heard nothing. Then they put their feet on their desks again, lighted fresh cigarettes, and resumed their scandalous gossip.

The desperate assistant had been betrothed for three years. People were continually asking him when the marriage would take place, and he always answered cheerily, “In the spring,” or “In the

John Cave

fall." It was, of course, impossible for him to marry; on his salary of eighteen dollars he could scarcely keep himself. But if he succeeded in ousting Williams. . . .

.
He tried to make friends with the leader writers, a half-dozen old men, silent and grim, who wrote interminable leaders on bimetallism, the tariff, the gold reserve.

The leader writers were willing to be flattered, they were willing to talk about themselves; but John soon learned that not one of them was willing to give him a friendly upward push. For some had heard from Lawson his opinion of their dry leaders, while the rest thought that, for his age and ability, he had already climbed higher on *The Press* than he deserved.

.
The rubber stamp man, Gray, he did not attempt to placate. Gray loathed him too profoundly. When the dark eyes of the fat copy reader rested on the youth, they glittered with maniacal hatred; and, as John left the local room, Gray always made some remark in a low voice to the shabby and middle-aged reporters grouped about him, and a shout of mocking laughter would arise.

John Cave

The Press, he mused, had grown old. The old men held all the posts of value; and in order to keep these posts, they fought against the advancement of the young men as desperately as kings fight against usurpers.

CHAPTER XVII

THEY were walking again in the forest. The day was grey and cold. A humid wind rattled the bare boughs with a dismal sound, and now and then, out of a sky as sordid and cheerless as a slum, a few white snowflakes fell.

"Are you discouraged?" said Diana sadly.

"Yes, damn it," said he.

"I am sorry," she faltered.

"All your time is passed with other men," he growled. "Your people have stopped speaking to me. My prospects are hopeless."

"Hopeless at *The Press*, perhaps, but ——"

"Hopeless everywhere," he interrupted. "I'm no good."

"You are fine," she said; "fine, if you'd work hard, and not get discouraged."

She looked at him earnestly. His brow cleared, he laughed. Her faith filled him again with hope and energy.

"If I could only," he said, "strike out for myself somehow."

A snowflake lighted softly on her cheek, and he watched the delicate and airy thing melt on the warm, pink flesh.

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"Do it," she said.

And she took his arm, and they walked gaily over the frozen ground, between the bare trees, while from the grey, cold sky the snow fell gently.

"I might syndicate," he mused.

"What is that?"

"To syndicate," he explained, "is to print a story simultaneously in different cities. For a low price you allow a dozen papers, one in each city, to print the same story on the same day."

"That sounds good," said Diana. "Try it."

"But I fear the field is overcrowded. I was talking to Alden about it, and he told me there was no money in syndicating any more. Still ——"

"Try it," said Diana. "Franklin's mother, you know, told him the field was overcrowded when he wanted to start a newspaper in Philadelphia. She pointed out that there were already two newspapers in America."

"I will try it!" he said.

"It will be fun," said she. "Even if you fail, it will be fun."

The storm was increasing. The snow lay on her sable stole, it clung in white burrs to her yellow hair; and smiling, panting, flushed, she looked at him with shining violet eyes through a pale flurry of flakes.

"Won't it be fun?" she said.

CHAPTER XVIII

AND fun it was, fun from the very start.

The first thing he would syndicate, he decided, would be a Sunday story, one of those news stories, illustrated with photographs, that the Sunday magazine sections used. He searched his mind, he searched the papers, for a good story, and in a day or two he had a dozen ideas.

He went over them with Diana in a quiet little restaurant in Locust Street.

"They are all good," said the young girl thoughtfully. "I don't know which to choose."

"The story of medicines made from snake venom would illustrate well," said he. "Or how about the young millionaire who lived for a year as a tramp? If he'd pose in his tramp disguise . . ."

"Last night," said Diana, "I thought of a story for you myself."

"Did you? What was it?"

But she frowned. She could not remember.

"I got out some old magazines and newspapers," she said, "and the idea came to me while I was looking them over. But it wasn't very good. You would have laughed at it, I'm sure."

John Cave

It pleased and touched him, the picture of this beautiful girl, with magazines and journals about her, bending over her desk in the lamplit silence, trying to help him. . . .

"Well," he said, turning to the list again, "what do you think? Shall we take the story of the fish doctor, the story of the beauty parlour for men, or ——"

"Oh," said Diana, "I remember my story now. That idol factory."

"Fine!" he cried.

And he congratulated her enthusiastically. He declared that she was a superb journalist. This idol factory story, he said, was better than all the stories that he had thought of put together.

It seemed truly that he could not have hit upon a better story wherewith to begin to syndicate. If there was any money to be made in syndicating, this story would gain some of it. If this story failed, then syndicating, as Alden had said, was indeed an overcrowded field.

The idol factory story for a week had been floating, like a lump of ambergris whose value no one perceives, in the currents of the news. Every day or so there had appeared an idol factory paragraph in the thousands of newspapers composing the American press; but only a brief paragraph, nothing more. Diana had been the first person to per-

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ceive how much more than a paragraph such a story was worth, the first person to recognise that this unclaimed object afloat in the news currents was true ambergris.

A Corean had come to America to buy idols for his people. Idols, he said, were made in America by machinery much more cheaply than they could be made by hand at home. For some years an idol factory in the Eastern States had been running overtime in order to meet the demands of the Corean trade.

Here in this city, the Corean declared, the idol factory was situated, and he was travelling hither from Seattle. A ten-line interview with him, dated at Denver, appeared in Monday's *Press*, a twelve-line interview, dated at Chicago, in Wednesday's, and so on.

But for a week or more nothing had been heard of the Corean. Nevertheless, with boundless energy and perseverance, John set out to find the idol factory.

His search was vain.

"There may be an idol factory here," he said, "but I am not a good enough detective to discover it."

"Does our story fall through, then?" said Diana, as she handed him his tea.

"I am afraid so."

John Cave

"Isn't that too bad?"

"Cheer up, pard," said he. "We'll 'fake' the story."

"But would you dare to fake it?"

"Why not? It would harm no one. I believe those interviews with the Corean were fakes themselves. And we sha'n't need to give the address of the factory nor the name of its owner: we'll repeat what the Corean said — that such things must be kept hidden, lest the religious element in the community rise up and wreck the plant."

The one difficulty about the fake was the photographs. But that was no great difficulty. Since the story would not appear in any local paper, Diana and her cousin agreed to pose for it, and the two girls met John and a photographer the next day in a secluded museum that contained a huge collection of idols.

They had the museum to themselves, and, with a few such "properties" as a chisel, a hammer and some old paint brushes, they set to work. Four photographs were made. In the first the girls knelt and painted a great Buddha. In the second the elderly photographer, whose skull cap gave him the true artist look, hacked with mallet and chisel at a Ganesh that happened to have an unfinished aspect. John, in the third, made with clay a model of the monkey god Hanuman. The fourth was a

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dozen idols in a row on a shelf, each tagged with a big price-card.

The pictures all were good. They illustrated the fake well. An idol factory, if such a place had existed, would probably have looked like this. John ordered twenty prints from each negative, and, having written his story, had twenty typewritten copies of it made.

All that cost something. The photographs cost twelve dollars, the manifolded eight. He realised that, if he had had his own camera, his own typewriter and his own copying machine, the cost would not have been more than five dollars altogether.

Finally everything was ready, and the twenty stories with their photographs were mailed to the chief papers in the twenty largest American cities, to be used, if accepted, on a Sunday three weeks hence. Ignorant of the prices that were paid for syndicated matter, the young man wrote at the top of each story, "At your usual rates."

Three of the twenty were returned in the week's course, and he sent them off again, each to a second paper in the city whence it had come back. After that he heard nothing more.

Whether it was good or bad luck to have only three of his twenty stories returned to him he could not tell.

"It looks like good luck to me," said Diana.

John Cave

"You can't tell," he replied. "I didn't enclose stamps. Perhaps the waste-paper basket ——"

"Won't you be glad when the fourteenth comes?"

The fourteenth at last arrived. He awoke early and leaped out of bed with a sudden grunt of consternation, muttering, "This is the fourteenth." He dressed in a frantic hurry, frowning and shaking his head. He could hardly shave, his hand trembled so. "I mustn't hope. There's no use hoping," he muttered.

The nearest news-stand was at the railway station, and he reached it, breathless.

"*The Call*," he said.

But the vendor, smiling pleasantly, shook his head. "*Calls* just out, brother."

With an oath he went on to the next news-stand. There they had *The Call*, and opening the enormous paper with awkward haste, he came at last upon the magazine section, and gave a gasp of joy.

There was Diana, there were the idols, there was De Witt in his skull cap; and these familiar photographs were surrounded with drawings in colour, great drawings that filled the page, of the idol factory's exterior, of the factory girls coming to work, and of many Coreans in devout attitudes beneath palms, kneeling and offering sacrifice to machine-made gods with price-tags about their necks.

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As he walked slowly homeward, he studied first the photographs and sketches, then he read the story, of which not one word had been altered; and inhaling with a deep breath the cold, sweet air of the winter morning, he murmured gratefully, "Well, well, well! Incredible!"

This little success, the first in his rather dreary, hopeless life, filled him with joy. For the first time he tasted the bracing joy that comes from successful work.

He got a Pittsburg and a Newark paper in the afternoon, and found that they too had used the story. And the next day the Western papers began to come in. From Chicago, from Detroit, from St. Louis, from Cincinnati they came, and the story was in all. The Southern papers had used it as well — Louisville, New Orleans, Memphis, Atlanta — and the papers of the Far West, Kansas City, Los Angeles, San Francisco. By the end of the week, in fine, he found that sixteen of his twenty stories had been printed.

Then came the cheques: twenty dollars from New York, eighteen from Chicago, ten from San Francisco, ten from Philadelphia, five from New Orleans, fifteen from Los Angeles, and so on. The cheques altogether amounted to a hundred and thirty dollars. This, less the expense, made his gain a hundred and ten dollars on the one story.

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A hundred and ten dollars! And it had hardly meant two days' work. He now perceived the astounding difference between working for one's self and working for someone else, the difference between keeping the profit of one's work and selling that profit, for a pittance, to some shrewder person.

And the joy of it! After certain anxious deliberations with Diana, he bought a big and expensive camera, a good typewriter, and a good copying machine, and at once began to send out other stories, doing all the work of them himself.

The work at first was slow and difficult. The camera embarrassed him most. Setting it up in public, he often lost his head: the tripod slipped, the great box overbalanced, and seizing in both arms the towering apparatus as it fell, he staggered about with it in an uncouth dance, while a little circle of bystanders strove to repress their smiles.

Yes, the work was difficult and slow at first; but it was always interesting, his skill grew apace, and on the cost of each story some fifteen or twenty dollars were saved.

He had plenty of time to syndicate one and even two stories a week without neglecting *The Press*. These stories succeeded. To him, accustomed to work at a salary no greater than a typesetter's, their success appeared tremendous. But none of them

John Cave

succeeded like the idol factory. On the average they only succeeded half as well.

But even that meant an income from syndicating twice and often three and four times greater than his salary. He opened a bank account, and his balance rose with incredible rapidity. His clothes, cut by a good tailor, caused him to be treated everywhere with deference. He drank nothing, took plenty of sleep and plenty of open-air exercise, and in consequence improved in looks. Among the shabby, stale, unshaven *Press* men, loafing their lives away, John, with his clear eyes, his ruddy brown colour, his fresh and elegant apparel, worked indefatigably. He ignored everybody. He no longer felt the need of making friends.

And lo, now that he had no need of friends, the whole office was turning friendly. It was pleasant, in lieu of looks of hatred, to encounter looks of respect; in lieu of jeers, compliments; in lieu of mocking laughter, appreciative smiles. But the pleasure turned to pain later on.

"Cave," said Gray, the rubber stamp man, "I hear you are syndicating."

"Yes, a little."

They were alone in the local room. Gray, having finished the editing of a local story, impaled the half-dozen sheets of yellow copy-paper on a hook, and leaning back, gave the young man a calm survey.

John Cave

But there was in his approving gaze a certain . . . and John looked away, vaguely conscious that something disagreeable impended.

"It pays pretty well, doesn't it?"

"Yes, thank you; pretty well."

"How would you like to take a partner?"

"I hadn't thought. . . . Why do you ask?" he faltered.

Gray spoke with condescension. "I'd like to go in with you."

"Would you?" John moved vaguely about the room. Strange that this interview, so painful to him, pained Gray not at all.

"My wife and I," the fat copy reader resumed, "have been talking it over. My future here is not . . ." He made an angry gesture, and his black eyes suddenly glittered with malice. "But I have twenty-five hundred dollars I shouldn't mind putting in. . . . Well, what do you say?"

"Capital isn't needed," John stammered. And in the effort to harden his heart, he recalled all Gray's insults, slights, venomous hatred; but refusing to harden, his heart softened with pity for this shabby, elderly man whom he was going to wound.

"Oh, there's nothing like capital," said Gray easily.

"Well, I'll think it over." As John hastened to-

John Cave

wards the door, he saw an angry, astounded look spread over Gray's plump face. "I'll let you know, Gray, if . . ."

"All right," said Gray coldly, and he relighted the stub of his cigar with a hand that had all of a sudden become tremulous. . . .

Then the irrepressible Lawson came and sat upon the manuscript littering John's desk.

"Cave," he said, "I'm going into the syndicating business. Give me some advice."

"What on?"

"Let me see. . . . I want to know the kind of stuff that sells best, how much to charge ——"

"Lawson, if you were going to open an upholstery shop in Peanut Street, would you go for help to the nearest Peanut Street upholsterer?"

"Oh, that is not the way to look at it. See here ——"

But John was firm. He refused to help Lawson in any way. Had he dreamed of asking help from an established rival when he began himself to syndicate?

Syndicating now spread like a contagion through *The Press* office. All the hours for which *The Press* paid them the men seemed to be devoting, as secretly as possible, to syndicate work. Here in a quiet corner an aged reporter compiled long lists of likely journals from the newspaper directory. There

John Cave

Williams, the dramatic editor, wrote a syndicate letter, "Personalialia Litteraria et Theatricala," hiding his manuscript from the inquisitive with an encircling arm. Gray examined surreptitiously in the hall a gelatine duplicator that he had just bought. With a guilty air the assistant dramatic editor addressed a pile of long envelopes. Lawson came and went on tiptoe with enormous boxes of stationery.

Lawson, John discovered, was submitting a number of weekly columns to three or four hundred newspapers — a woman's column, a column of inventions, a column of men's fashions. John saw a proof of the woman's column. Its first paragraph ran:

"Mary Jane Smith, washlady, Kankakee, picked her ear with a rusty hairpin. Interment strictly private. No flowers."

He smiled. So that was Lawson's idea of the material in demand for the average journal's magazine page. Well, he need have no fear of Lawson.

Clayton took up syndicating in a large way. He opened a suite of offices, named himself the "International News Association," and engaged a photographer, a reporter and a stenographer. His stories, abundantly illustrated with costly photographs, went broadcast over America, England, France, Germany, even Russia. Some of them

John Cave

sold, but Clayton's expenses were enormous, and for three months his harassed, desperate face contrasted oddly with his gala attire. Then one fine day his brow cleared. The International News Association, bankrupt, was no more.

Collier alone escaped the syndicate fever. His feet on his desk, he lay back, lazier than ever, in his chair; a newspaper hid him from the waist up; so, it seemed, his life passed.

But he knew what was going on, and with a sour laugh he would say:

"Lawson, if you can spare *The Press* a half-hour from your syndicate, do Councils to-day."

In that sarcastic and annoying manner he now gave out all his assignments.

CHAPTER XIX

THEY were brutal and cruel words, but nevertheless he meant them.

"If you go abroad with that crowd——"

"But I must go, dear."

"Your aunt wants to separate us, eh?"

"I'll say nothing about that."

"You junketing all over Europe with a lot of young men, and me working here at home like a slave——"

"But if I must go," she said.

"Then have our engagement announced."

"It is impossible. Auntie would not consent."

It was on the tip of his tongue to demand that she marry him at once, but he made no such demand. For he was not yet ready to marry; he had not yet saved enough money to furnish even the smallest apartment; and, though his syndicate had done well so far . . .

"I see how it is," he blurted. "I am on trial. If I make a success, you'll marry me; if not, you'll throw me over."

Brutal and cruel words, and the young girl rose

John Cave

from her seat on the fallen oak. There were tears in her eyes, but she smiled bravely.

“Good-bye, John Cave.”

And she hurried away.

Slim grey columns uprose everywhere out of the snow. The setting sun floated, very red, in the liquid gold of the sky. Here and there the forest's white carpet glowed with a faint pink flush.

Towards the sunset, down the still aisles of slim grey columns, Diana hurried over the snow. In the carriage of her shoulders there was something suggestive of wounds and pain.

CHAPTER XX

HE had lost her. And with her all hope, all energy, all strength seemed lost. How weak he was! He saw now how weak. She had propped him as certain plants must be propped, and thanks to her he had flourished, growing tall and vigorous, bearing good fruit. But now the prop was gone. He swayed uncertainly from side to side. Would he fall?

He went home, and taking a manuscript from his pocket, he began to copy it on the typewriter. The typewriter clicked busily, and amid the sound he sighed. But the machine clicked on, and, as he worked, the dim curtains of the dusk were drawn about him silently. He bent forward to make out a word, sighed again, and rising, turned on the lamp. Then he lighted a cigarette, looked at the typewriter, frowned. He sauntered to the window. His hands in his pockets, he gazed dreamily at the wistful evening sky. Would he fall?

An hour later he sat in a café with a bottle of champagne and a book. But the wine failed to cheer him, the novel would not hold his mind, and

John Cave

bidding the waiter set a telephone on the table, he rang up Prudence.

"Prudence," he said, "this is John Cave."

"What does John Cave want with me?"

Her voice was hard and cold. He had not seen her for months. He had not thought of her.

"I'm lonely. Will you dine with me to-night?"

"I can't. He's coming."

"Oh, put him off."

She hesitated. Then, "All right," she said.

He hurried home and dressed, and called for her in a hansom. Her maid met him at the door before he could ring, and led him, her finger on her lip, into a darkened anteroom.

"Wait here," she said. "He's with her."

From the library came the sound of voices, the guttural, coarse notes of a man's voice, the clear and silvery notes of the voice of a girl. The man, enraged, stormed. The girl's replies were disdainful and calm. Suddenly John started, shuddering with disgust. The man had begun to weep.

Drawing the curtain back a little, he peered cautiously into the room.

A fat man was bowed forward on the seat of the *lit clos*, his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands. Amid his hoarse sobs and sighs he made heartbroken complaints:

John Cave

"I wouldn't treat a dog so." . . . "Oh, my God!" . . . "Have you no pity?"

Prudence sat in a great arm-chair of carved black oak. She wore a crimson dressing-gown of Japanese silk embroidered in silver with huge storks. A cigarette hung from between her scarlet lips. Her knees were crossed, showing her little red shoes and her smooth stockings of red silk, and her hands were clasped behind her head so that the loose sleeves of her Japanese gown, fallen back, left her beautiful white arms bare.

She regarded the man scornfully. "You had better go," she said.

He continued to sob. She pressed the bell, and he rose hurriedly as the maid entered. Not too grief-stricken to pose before the maid, he said in a blustering tone:

"It will be many a day before you see me here again."

"So much the better," said she. "But I must dress now."

"Be careful," he growled, "or by God, girl, I'll turn you out in the street."

"Go home," she said. "Go home to your wife and children."

Splendid and insolent in her dress of crimson and silver, her knees crossed and her hands clasped behind her head, Prudence sat in the great chair, a

John Cave

picture of youth enthroned and reigning cruelly. She laughed as the fat, bald man of middle age waddled forth, and she rose and held out both hands as John entered by the other door.

"Oh," she said, "you are dressed. Then I can wear my new gown." And she hurried away with the maid.

He mixed a whisky and soda, lighted a cigarette, and sat before the fire with a book. But he did not read. He sipped his sharp and bracing drink, he inhaled the aromatic Egyptian tobacco, he looked thoughtfully into the blaze. Gay voices, fresh young laughter came from the other room. The loss of Diana did not mean the loss of all joy.

But the beautiful dreams he had had. . . . Those dreams were lost. They were to have lived together . . . grown old together . . . he and she . . . grown old together. . . .

"I'm ready if you are."

Prudence, drawing on her long white gloves, advanced in a white dinner-gown that made her look very tall. At her throat a star of diamonds glittered with hard, cold scintillations.

John praised her dress. She listened calmly, taking from a gold bonbonnière a tiny morphine tabloid, and the maid threw over her glistening white shoulders a long cloak of ermine.

John Cave

The door bell, a persistent finger on its button, rang with a continuous tinkle. Marie ran to silence it, and soon they heard the fat man storming at her in a wild voice. The door crashed to upon him, and returning, Marie said:

"He swears he'll stand before the house till he gets in."

"He'll stand there all night then," said Prudence. But suddenly she frowned. "Damn it, though; that prevents our going out."

They waited a half-hour, but the fat man, true to his vow, kept watch on the other side of the snowy street, his back against a lamp-post, his arms folded, smoking.

"I suppose his fat keeps him warm," John muttered angrily.

Not daring to venture forth, they telephoned, instead, an order to the Westminster, and soon a waiter brought their dinner to them. But it was a dull dinner. Every little while the fat man's ring annoyed them, and though there was champagne, Prudence drank only mineral water.

"Do have a liqueur with your coffee," John said, at the dinner's end, as he lighted a cigarette.

"No, thank you," she replied. She took another tabloid from her bonbonnière.

He sipped the honey-laden liqueur, then the bitter coffee, and, stimulated, he began to talk. He

John Cave

told her he had been working very hard of late. He had drunk nothing all winter—had only worked, worked. But now all that was to be changed. Hereafter he would mingle a little pleasure with his labour. One day a week was to be devoted to pleasure.

“What do you mean by pleasure?” she asked gravely.

“Being with you,” said he.

Her lip curled. She rose and went wearily to the hall window. “He is still there,” she said on her return. “It is snowing again, too.”

They stared at the cloth in moody silence.

“This is stupid,” said he. “Where is the brandy?”

Prudence laughed. “How I know you!”

He frowned across the table at her, but her beauty dispelled his frown. Above the lovely brow the soft dark hair was full of shadow, perfume and mystery. The scarlet lips curved, and the gaze of the starry eyes was a caress. She bent towards him, the delicate flesh swelled above the décolleté bodice, and the light ran wavering and gleaming over the satinlike surface of arms and shoulders and neck.

“After all,” he said, “we don’t want to quarrel. I’ll tell you what we’ll do. I’ll get in some champagne, and you will lie on the couch by the fire . . .

John Cave

and smoke . . . like that other night. . . . Do you remember?"

She drew forth her lay-out. "Ah," she repeated, looking straight into his eyes, "how I know you, John Cave!"

CHAPTER XXI

SHE knew him. That was what they were always saying. How often he had heard, heard till it sickened him, the contemptuous appraisement, "I know you, John Cave."

Well, he was, undoubtedly, weak; but he was strong, too; in short, like other men, a mixture.

Now, to prove his strength, he tried for a month, at odd moments, to get out the syndicate story that he had typewritten on the afternoon of his quarrel with Diana. He would mix a quart of developer, put a negative in the printing-frame, turn on the lamp, and begin to expose and develop prints—only, half an hour later, inexplicably bored, to destroy the unfinished work and seize his hat. . . . Or he would open the copying machine and commence to copy furiously; but a page would go wrong, and with an oath he would rush out. . . . Now, on fire with energy and zeal, he hastened home, determined to work as of old, and at the mere sight of his lonely room, aghast at the thought of toiling there all by himself, he turned upon his heel. . . . Again he entered briskly, saying, "I

John Cave

must, must work," and throwing himself on the bed, he slept for hours like a log.

He sent out no more syndicate stories.

And his appearance changed rapidly. He was no longer ruddy, clear-eyed, elegant, but a pale and listless sloven during working hours, and after midnight a noisy drunkard. Soon all the money that he had in bank was gone.

The men again despised him. There was nothing, they said, in syndicating, and at last Cave, too, had found it out.

Then Norris, the managing editor, resigned on account of ill health, and thus he lost his only friend on *The Press*. That loss was not long in making itself felt. Clayton, the new managing editor, gave him nothing to do for three days, and then put in his letter-box a note that said:

"MY DEAR MR. CAVE,—After a careful examination of your work, I find that for some time past it has not been of such quality as to warrant a continuation of your present salary. Therefore I am compelled, in justice to the rest of our staff, to reduce you five dollars, the reduction to go into effect next week. Hereafter, also, you will be enrolled on the pay-sheet of the local department, and will please report to Mr. Collier. Yours respectfully,

H. HERBERT CLAYTON."

John Cave

He read the note in the front room, standing by the letter-box. As soon as he finished it, his face burning with shame, he hid it in his pocket, and looked quickly at the other men. But their heads were turned away; perhaps they did not know.

Clayton, in a blue frock coat and a brown sombrero, sat at his new desk, filling the room with a sweet and powerful odour of heliotrope essence. He bustled among a heap of letters and clippings with a pompous air, proud of his promotion, and his smooth-shaven face gave him a strange, unfamiliar look, for he had recently worn a great moustache and beard.

John caught his eye, approached him, and said in a low voice:

“I’m sorry you had to do this, Mr. Clayton.”

Clayton gave him a kindly smile of condescension.

“You must brace up, Cave,” he said. “Show them what you’re made of.”

“I’ll try to, sir.”

Then, to pull himself together, he went out into the long, empty hall, and began to pace up and down. He felt hopelessly dishonoured. What was he coming to? What would be his end?

Crushed, cowed as he was, he at first regarded his demotion as a just punishment. But in a little while his humiliation gave place to bitter, help-

John Cave

less rage. After all, he had not worked badly for *The Press*—certainly he had worked better than Clayton, who hardly gave the paper an hour a day. But now Clayton had been made managing editor because his father was the editor-in-chief, while he had been reduced because Norris, his one friend, was gone.

If only he had kept on syndicating, if only he had not drawn all his money out of bank, he could have told Clayton to go to the devil with his five-dollar reduction, and left the abominable place for good. He ought, of course, to leave now, but he was afraid; he had no money, and, moreover, he was in debt.

Wringing his hands, he paused before the door of the local room. His heart beat so violently that his breathing was laboured, like a runner's. He swallowed a lump in his dry throat, and moistened his dry lips with his tongue. But he must go in some time. He opened the door and entered.

It was the same dusty local room, everybody with a newspaper open at arm's length, the city editor reading languidly, the reporters shouting and arguing as, like messenger boys, they awaited their errands for the afternoon.

He paused by the door. Collier looked up at him, and then lowered his head to escape the young man's salutation. The reporters exchanged know-

John Cave

ing glances over the tops of their newspapers, and John sat down disconsolately among the unkempt band to await the assignments that in an hour or two Collier would begin to give out.

Again he watched Collier yawn through his belated reading, and again he heard the reporters, embittered by failure, rail at the successful persons who figured in the news. So an hour passed, and one by one the men, their work at last allotted to them, thrust some yellow copy-paper in their pockets and departed. John and Collier were left alone.

"Mr. Collier," said the young man.

Collier gave him a frozen look. "Well?"

"Clayton tells me I am to report to you hereafter."

"Yes; I know."

And Collier put back crosswise in his mouth the pencil that he had withdrawn in order to speak; and, lifting his paper up before his face again, he resumed his reading. Nothing of him was visible but his feet and legs sprawled across the desk-top amid a litter of clippings, manuscript and proofs.

Another hour passed. It was now four o'clock. From his suburban home Gray arrived, and the city editor, leaving the local room in Gray's charge, went out, not to return till seven. It was plain that John would get no afternoon assignment.

He sat in the local room in idleness till eight

John Cave

o'clock, when Collier, in giving out the night assignments, omitted him again. Then he hurried forth for dinner, returned at nine, and sat in idleness till midnight. And so home to his lonely room with a pint of whisky.

That continued for a week. For a week he sat in the local room from one o'clock in the afternoon till midnight, and not one assignment was given to him, and neither Collier nor his two assistants once spoke to him. He ought to have resigned, but he had only three dollars.

Collier on Friday allotted the afternoon assignments, omitting him as usual, and an hour later he went downstairs and drew the week's salary that he had done nothing to earn. He did not return to the local room. He went out and began to drink.

From one saloon to another he passed; his depression soon gave place to hope. . . . It was well that he had lost Diana, for he was not worthy of marriage. He would be a vile scoundrel to let any girl confide her life to one so weak. . . . As for *The Press*, he would return to it no more. He would begin at once to syndicate again, and he would make the money in his pocket keep him till, a month or so hence, the syndicate cheques began to come in.

Reckless and gay, he continued to drink, meeting this acquaintance and that, spending more and more

John Cave

money, till finally only a few dollars remained, and to leave *The Press* was again impossible.

At ten o'clock he walked with uncertain steps into the local room, and stood blinking in the bright light. His face was flushed, his eyes glazed, and his breathing stertorous. The local room was crowded. As through a mist he saw Collier and Gray reading copy, and the reporters writing busily at their desks.

He had not even a desk in the local room. He looked about him, snorting, panting, spied a chair in a corner, lurched over to it, and sat down heavily, facing the busy room.

He sat there a long time. He saw Gray turn and regard him, then lean over and whisper something to Collier. Occasionally a reporter looked at him and grinned. But he frowned at the grinning face till it withdrew.

Gray got up and went out, returning in a moment with Clayton, the managing editor. Clayton looked at him. Through a bright and confusing mist he saw Clayton's face full of derision and scorn. He glared ferociously at it till it, too, was withdrawn.

Old man Clayton, the editor-in-chief, waddled in. He regarded John stolidly. His face, huge in the bright mist, oscillated a little. The young man frowned it away. . . .

John Cave

He began to feel drowsy. A doze would be pleasant.

"Cave, clear out!"

The high, nasal voice made him start. He must have been asleep. With a smile he regarded Collier, who was shouting at him from his seat on the other side of the big room.

"Clear out, Cave, and don't come back!"

"Speaking to me?" he asked.

"Yes, of course. Clear out!"

"What?"

"Clear out, you drunken fool!"

A shout of mocking laughter caused him to gaze in bewilderment about the room. The room was full of mocking faces, and all those mocking eyes gazed into his. Besides the reporters, Clayton and his father were there, three or four old leader writers, the dramatic editor, the assistant dramatic editor.

Comprehending at last that he had been discharged, he rose and put on his hat. What did he care if he was discharged? Now was his chance. He would now tell them all what he thought of them — them and their miserable sheet.

First he would talk to Collier. He lurched across the room, now grasping a desk to steady himself, now resting his hand on the bent head of a busy reporter.

John Cave

“Collier,” he said. “Collier, you lazy devil ——”

But Collier turned his back upon him, and he seized the man’s shoulders to swing him round in his revolving chair.

“Look out!” cried a voice.

“Collier, I want to tell you ——”

Collier leaped up suddenly. The young man stepped back; he stumbled over something; and Collier struck him a terrific blow on the cheek, and he fell sidewise on a desk.

He rose to oppose the crowd that rushed upon him; but pushes, kicks and blows knocked him this way and that. There were oaths and cries, the crash of falling chairs and tables, and amid the turmoil he heard, in a dazed way, his own voice, feverish and high. He struggled, he shouted, and at the same time he felt only the deepest shame, the deepest humiliation. . . .

They forced him to the door. He clutched it firmly, why he did not know. But a very strong hand seized him by the back of the neck, and he was flung out into the hall with such violence that he fell on his face. Then the door banged to, and he rose and began to brush the dust from his trousers and coat. The door opened again, someone threw out his hat. He picked it up, and, as he cleaned it with his sleeve, he heard within the sound of excited voices, breathless laughter.

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

HE had pawned his camera and typewriter, and now, armed with twenty dollars, he was about to storm New York. From the windy bow of the ferry-boat he gazed sourly at New York across the shabby river.

New York seemed to consist of eight or ten cardboard sky-scrapers, with some hundreds of low and dingy buildings squatting about their feet. A paltry-looking place: nevertheless it frightened him.

Landing, he walked through muddy streets in search of a cheap room. Mean throngs in dark clothes hurried to and fro, intent as ants. Artificial rain fell in the window of a dealer in rubber goods, and a young man in a waterproof coat paced amid the downpour. Three youths, salesmen in a flower shop, wore white flannels and white straw hats, and an attendant sprinkled the sidewalk with violet perfume. A dozen men in mediæval dress strode by, advertising a new historical novel. Could he cope with such enterprise as this?

Late in the afternoon he secured a small, clean room up town for two dollars a week. He got his

John Cave

luggage in, then dined for fifteen cents, at an oil-cloth-covered table, on liver and bacon and fried potatoes. It was not a bad meal.

He visited *The Star* office in the morning. The city editor of *The Star*, he noted with a pang, was younger than himself.

"Are you a college man, Mr. Cave?"

"Yes."

"What paper are you with now?"

"Ah — er — none."

"Well, there is no opening here at present. However, for a genius ——"

"Oh, I don't pretend to be a genius."

"No, of course not. At the same time ——"

"Suppose I bring some samples of my work for you to see?"

"Yes; I wish you would."

He brought four samples, and was bidden to come back the next morning.

The next morning he met at the door of the outer office a boy with a long envelope in his hand.

"Mr. Cave?" said the boy, extending the envelope.

John snatched it and tore it open hurriedly. It contained his samples, nothing more. He gulped.

"Well?"

"The city editor says there is no opening, sir."

He found himself on a bench in a public square.

John Cave

He was hot with shame, and there was a *Star* in his hand. He read the paper through from beginning to end. Crude, vulgar stuff, for geniuses to write. . . .

Eight papers that day repulsed him. The ninth, *The Dispatch*, took him on at once. But *The Dispatch* was Miles's paper, and Miles was Prudence's friend. He had intended to get a New York berth through his own merit solely, but to Prudence, after all, his new berth was due.

He dined well that night, and after dinner, his coffee and cigarette-case on the table before him, a novel in his hand, he weighed life bitterly to the music of a Tzigane band.

He had once thought that only merit counted. Well, there was even unusual merit in his work, yet it had failed to secure him a humble reporter's place. But for Prudence's friendship, but for help regarded generally as shameful, he might have starved here in New York.

Merit, transcendent merit, counted for nothing by itself, but the most ordinary merit, joined to a kind of hypocritical ability to win the liking and esteem of the men in the high places, counted for everything.

He would acquire, he told himself, that hypocritical ability (it should be easy), and lighting a fresh cigarette, he decided to flatter the men over

John Cave

him on *The Dispatch* and at the same time to boast discreetly — to boast modestly, as it were — pointing out all the excellences that would from time to time appear in his own work.

CHAPTER II

THE editorial writers, the illustrators and special writers of *The Dispatch* were the best to be found in America — a galaxy of stars of unexampled price and glitter. And *The Dispatch's* editor was a man of genius, like Wagner, like Velasquez.

John Cave entered Herkimer's office humbly, yet with a timid hope fluttering in his heart. For he had worshipped Herkimer from boyhood; his love of Herkimer's work was one of the few boyish loves that he had not outgrown; and as he diffidently advanced, his huge scrap-book under his arm, he hoped absurdly that the editor might admire his stories, might feel a little towards him as he felt towards Herkimer.

"How do you do, Mr. Cave? Won't you sit down?"

Herkimer, who had been standing by the window looking out, turned and advanced gravely. He was younger than John had thought, tall, healthily lean. The blue eyes were clear and frank; the compressed lips could curve in a gay and charming smile.

Herkimer's dress seemed elegant but odd to the

John Cave

young man, who did not know that it was fresh from London, and that in two years, like all the London fashions, it would be adopted in America in a curiously exaggerated form.

John seated himself, the huge scrap-book balanced on his knees. "Thank you, Mr. Herkimer," he said. "I know your work very well."

He felt crude under Herkimer's clear gaze. And the unwonted sincerity and reverence in his voice gave it, he noticed, a queer, high, drawling quality, a most unpleasant quality, a kind of whine.

Herkimer walked to and fro. "What would you like to do for us?" he said.

"Mr. Miles submitted some of my stories to your Sunday editor," John replied, "and Mr. Appleton liked ——"

"But that must have been a long time ago," Herkimer interrupted. "Mr. Miles is abroad now. You are the first in his list, but Appleton is no longer here."

John drew a deep, unsteady breath, and opening the enormous scrap-book, he said:

"In that case, perhaps, my scrap-book will show you what I am best fitted for."

His eyes sought the editor's with doglike devotion, but Herkimer did not look at him; to Herkimer he was only a dissipated reporter who

John Cave

owed his introduction to some worthless girl or other.

“I’ll run over your scrap-book. Come and see me again at noon to-morrow, Mr. Cave.”

The young man, in departing, had an impulse to tell Herkimer how deeply he admired him. He wanted to say that at college he had bought *The Sunday Times* to read Herkimer’s stories about Mars, and afterwards had traced him somehow, though his work was always unsigned, from *The Times* to *The Dispatch*, and for years had not missed one of his wonderful daily leaders. He wanted to say that those leaders seemed to him equal to the work of the world’s greatest writers; not mere written words, metaphors, ornaments and flourishes, but a voice; that Herkimer had so mastered the art of expression that his prose, instead of draping, blanket fashion, his thought, or adorning it as with knots of ribbon, was the very thought itself — a voice, simple and clear, speaking from the page.

And he began, “I want to say, Mr. Herkimer ——”

But there was the whine again, and he paused. He paused, he laid the great scrap-book on a table too near the edge, and it crashed to the floor. He had to kneel to gather up the loose papers that had

John Cave

fallen from it, and kneeling he looked helplessly up into the editor's face.

Herkimer regarded him curiously. For the moment he saw in the young man something touching, something inarticulate but very sincere.

"Yes?" he said, gently.

"I want to say, Mr. Herkimer . . . to say . . . I have admired your work a long time . . . for many years."

He rose. He opened the door, blushing hotly.

"Thank you, Mr. Cave," said Herkimer, with a faint smile.

CHAPTER III

It was one of the greatest disappointments of his life, on his return the next day, to find a curt note bidding him report to the city editor. For he had hoped, because he admired Herkimer, that Herkimer would admire him. He had hoped for a post of honour on *The Dispatch*.

Sadly he put the huge scrap-book under his arm and took the lift for the local room.

The local room was a place of hurry and flurry and suspense. Typewriters clicked; messengers darted in and out; young editors, their sleeves rolled up over white, thin arms, plied enormous blue pencils frantically. In the local room everyone was afraid of being outdone, of being tardy, of being discharged. Faces were pale and anxious. Hands shook.

And here John Cave was enrolled in a band of thirty or forty young men who could not write, whose stories gave the intelligent actual nausea. But these young men were excellent detectives, they often beat the police in ferreting out a crime, and in gathering their facts there was no law of

John Cave

delicacy, of pity, of decency, that they hesitated to break.

For Herkimer, continually trying new methods to increase *The Dispatch's* circulation, sought at this time readers of the lowest order of intellect. To attract these readers he would supply them with news articles treated in the most vulgar, maudlin and sensational manner — news articles like the novels popular among them — and he had recently filled his local staff with young men capable of writing such news articles with sincerity.

And for work like that he had adjudged John Cave best fitted!

The new reporter from the beginning made sixty, seventy, eighty dollars a week. But . . .

A rich man, a church pillar, fell dead late one night at the residence of a widow, and at eleven o'clock a sub-editor said to John, "It is rumoured that the widow was his mistress. Here is the address of his wife. Go to her, tell her of her husband's death, and find out if the rumour about the widow and him is true."

A popular novelist of incredible deformity, a hunchback hardly four feet in height, was to be married to a tall, beautiful girl, and John was sent to the wedding with a hand-camera in the hope that he might get a snapshot of the bridal pair arm-in-arm. He got the snapshot, but the hunchback,

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hearing the click of the shutter, leaped on the young man, wrenched the camera from his hands, and smashed it to pieces on the sidewalk.

There is no way of turning a man out of a house that he did not undergo. Sometimes a butler, delegated to the task, would take him by the arm and turn him out with a certain dignity. Sometimes a woman would order him forth with angry tears. Sometimes a man would push him over the lintel with both hands, try even to give him a parting kick. He could not get used to being turned out of houses. His agony, as he silently submitted, was always intense. He always felt, as the door crashed to, disgraced for life.

Embittered by the ignominy daily heaped upon him, he wrote his stories without pity. He handled his living heroes and heroines as if they were fictions his mind had created. He never dreamed in his stories of holding back a sentence because it might hurt. He never considered the pain, needless and cruel, that his characters would suffer the next day on reading what he had written.

So the summer passed.

He stood on an October afternoon with an illustrator before the show-window of a famous milliner. The window was filled with beautiful furs and gowns, and as the two young men worked hurriedly, a Frenchman ran forth bareheaded.

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“Thieves!” he cried. “Thieves!”

The illustrator drew John away. “We must get out of this,” he said. “There’ll be a row.”

They paused at the next corner. “He doesn’t want us to steal his models, eh?” said John.

“And why should he?” the illustrator demanded. “He employs designers at tremendous salaries, and as soon as these designers create some beautiful new fashion, you and I appear, sketch and describe the fashion — steal it is the right term — and in a week it is common property all over the country. But come, let us go back and try again.”

They returned, the coast was clear, and as they bent over the window, intent as ants upon their work, a porter came forth suddenly and threw a pail of water over them.

“What the devil ——” John gasped. Wiping the water from his eyes, he turned wrathfully this way and that. The porter with a chuckle had disappeared, but a crowd was gathering fast.

“Don’t stand there!” cried the illustrator. A cab was at the curb, and he pushed John in before him. “Thank heaven,” he said, as the door closed.

The cabman’s scowling face appeared at the window. “Don’t set down on them cushions o’ mine, gents.”

That evening, as he awaited in fresh clothes his

John Cave

night assignment, John pondered *The Dispatch's* faults. He gasped again in the icy shock of the pail of water, but it was a pail of water merited by his mean theft. . . . He thought of the camera torn from him by the hunchback bridegroom, and he remembered the trembling hands of the poor little novelist, his red, enraged face, and the tears starting from his eyes. . . . He thought of the widow, a widow of but three hours' standing, whom he had questioned about her dead husband's mistress, and he remembered the widow's pale horror of him and his questions. . . . He thought of this man and that who had turned him out of the house. . . . They had all suffered, but he had suffered, too, doing these revolting things to earn his bread.

And he asked himself bitterly if Herkimer had the right, no matter how many thousands it might add to *The Dispatch's* circulation, to inflict all this ignominy and shame.

"Mr. Cave!" shouted a flurried young sub-editor.

He advanced to the sub-editor's desk.

"Mr. Cave," said the young man, "Addison Winthrop set out on a Southern cruise in his yacht last week, and it is rumoured now that he took a well-known society woman along with him. Look up Winthrop's clubs in the Blue Book. Maybe

John Cave

some of the clubmen can give you a fact or two. And go and see Mrs. Winthrop, and find out what you can from her. If a divorce ——”

John laughed. “Oh, hell!”

The sub-editor, affronted, looked up, puzzled inquiry in his bright, excited eyes.

“That’s a pleasant job now, isn’t it?” John went on. “To ask a young wife if it’s true that her husband has gone off with another woman! How would you like to go and ask her that yourself, you little mire-snipe?”

The sub-editor frowned. “This is insubordination,” he said.

“Oh,” John retorted, “insubordination be damned!”

But the sub-editor was too busy to quarrel. “Really, Mr. Cave,” he began, in an absent voice, and his eyes roved over the room, searching another man for the Winthrop story. “Really . . . ah . . . Mr. Carrol!” Already John was forgotten.

He returned to his desk complacently. It was a good thing to let these coarse rascals know what he thought of them . . . and he had intended for some time to leave *The Dispatch* anyway . . . he had five hundred dollars saved. . . .

On the way out he saw Herkimer entering his office. Freedom plus five hundred dollars made him bold, and he stopped and said:

John Cave

"Good-bye, Mr. Herkimer. I am leaving to-night."

"I'm sorry," Herkimer answered. "There was promise in some of your stories." He smiled gently. "Stop showing off," he said. "Write thinking of your subject alone."

This crumb of praise from the great Herkimer put him in a pleasant glow. Nevertheless he said angrily:

"I had a pail of water thrown over me to-day. I keep asking myself why a man like you should get out a paper so unspeakably vile as *The Dispatch*."

Herkimer frowned, half turned away; then, changing his mind, he said:

"Why discuss it? If you have any intelligence you must see the reason for yourself."

"Is the trash to get circulation?"

"To be sure," said Herkimer impatiently. "It is the bait. We catch them; then we try to teach them. *The Dispatch* isn't all trash."

The young man's devotion surged back into his heart, driving away all rancour due to the pail of water. He forgot the deformed novelist and the widow, and when he spoke again he was aware of that unpleasant whine, caused by deep feeling, in his voice:

John Cave

"I surmised as much. They say upstairs you are a hypocrite. But I know better."

"I am often misunderstood," said Herkimer. "And you, a clever enough lad, owed your introduction here to some queer girl or other, and in consequence I set you down as rather hopeless. I didn't go over your scrap-book, or I'd have made you a special writer, and you'd have been spared that humiliating pail of water."

"Really?" John stammered.

Herkimer nodded; his look was kind; and he said, as he held out his hand:

"We must dine together some time. And if you ever want to come back. . . ."

CHAPTER IV

NOT needing immediate work, he got it; and the day after he left *The Dispatch* John Cave, seated in the office of Alonzo Roberts, wrote with pleased smiles an advertisement of the Z. Hilary McMasters method of increasing the height, a cartilage-stretching method whereby the height of any person under sixty years of age could be increased from three to seven inches.

Alonzo Roberts had begun business as an advertisement writer a year ago. He had begun modestly; his bedroom had been his office; but in six months, so greatly had he prospered, the little bedroom office had grown into a Tower Building suite. This suite, furnished in bright yellow oak, now boasted an errand boy in buttons, a pale, thin bookkeeper, and a beautiful typewriter girl with golden hair.

Here John went to work on a profit-sharing basis—half profits on all the advertisements he wrote. He was very successful. Roberts showed him the way, and under Roberts's guidance he produced advertisements that were in every respect like all the

John Cave

other advertisements which overran America at that time.

He advertised, for instance, Orient Tooth Powder. Orient Tooth Powder was made of tinted chalk, and it was worth about six dollars a ton; but he advertised it, at twenty-five cents an ounce, as a powder made of the betel-nut of Ceylon. But here he paused. Did the betel-nut come from Ceylon or from . . . No matter: he would not bother to look the detail up: and dipping his pen again, he said that the Ceylonese had the best teeth in the world; they never suffered from toothache, and when they died, no matter what their age, every tooth was intact. Why? He quoted from Huxley a paragraph that he made up as he went along:

“Chewers of the betel-nut have always perfect teeth for the reason that the meat of the betel-nut, a highly aseptic substance, is a perfect dental preservative. Remove the colouring matter, which slightly stains the enamel, and add a little chalk, which whitens it, and we should have in the betel-nut an ideal dentifrice—a dentrifrice that would, indeed, soon rid the world of dentists.”

Orient Tooth Powder, he told the public, was made after Huxley's recipe, and they who used it had Huxley's word that their teeth would never decay.

The powder succeeded. Its manufacturer said

John Cave

that, as betel-nut powder, it sold ten times better than it had sold as ordinary chalk.

"Young man," said the pleased manufacturer, "you are a wonder. And now look here. I'm working on a skin food made of soap fat. Can't we put that out as Oriental, too? . . . call it Abdallah Cream, and say it's made of the rich oils of the Saharan date palm, or something of that kind? You know what I mean."

"Yes," said John Cave; "I understand."

He advertised men's ready-made clothing, though he never called it ready-made, deeming that phrase to have a cheap sound, but ready-to-put-on, or ready-built, or ready-to-wear, or, simply, ready. And wonderful in these clothing advertisements was his talk of hand-padded collars, false vents at sides creased up, shape-retaining French canvas interlinings, concave shoulders, ripple skirts, quilted hips.

He advertised Puritea, a tea at twenty cents a pound, the refuse of the warehouses. He said that tea was at once a food and a stimulant. He said that Englishwomen owed their rosy complexions to the great quantities of tea — some twelve or fifteen cups — that they drank daily. He said that the success of Krupp, Curie, and Russell Sage had been due to the tea they consumed, for tea had enabled them to double their working hours. Then, out of of his own head again, he quoted Darwin:

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"Haggard from twenty-four hours of unceasing toil over the Andaman earthworms, I drank three cups of tea, and at once felt as fresh and strong as if I had just risen from a good night's rest. With renewed energy I set to work again, and laboured on without fatigue for sixteen hours more. How wonderful a thing is pure tea!"

Chuckling, the Puritea man said:

"Rub it in that ours is the only pure one. Say all the rest are drugged."

He advertised a great many oatmeals, cornmeals, hominies and the like, and of course every one of them was pre-digested, and the air of the rooms they were made in was sterilised and filtered, and the packets they were put up in were germ-proof, and they all developed the muscles like football and the brain like trigonometry.

He prospered, and at the height of his prosperity Alonzo Roberts introduced him to Adolf Wolff.

"I've heard good reports of you, young man," Mr. Wolff began. "Harrington says you doubled his income with them ads about his copper mine. What was the idea? A cent a share—ten thousand shares payable in dollar a week instalments! Ha, ha! Good!"

"It did go good," John agreed, with a modest smile.

"And Baldy Walsh says he's making twenty

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thousand a year out of a hair restorer that you handle."

"Oh, yes; you mean Scalpene-Dandruffia."

Wolff nodded. Huge and sleek, he puffed in his chair, and his great stomach made his legs look strangely short, bulging out over them nearly to his knees.

"Listen here," he said, in his rich, husky voice. "I cleaned up fifty thousand last week, and I want to take a flyer in advertisin'. I want to launch a company. Everything's ready — directors, charter, everything; and I'm willing to give you a fifty thousand dollar contract to advertise the stock. What do you say?"

"Thank you. That is what I say. Thank you."

"All right, then. Let's get down to business."

"What kind of a company is it, Mr. Wolff?"

"It's a company with a capital of five million dollars in one dollar shares, and it has been formed to build and put on the market home icemakers."

"Home icemakers?"

"That's what I said. Machines for everybody to have in the cellar to make their own ice with. Like icecream freezers, only simpler."

"By Jove, great!" cried the young man. His cheeks flushed, his eyes sparkled. "Won't that be a stock to advertise!"

"Won't it?" said Mr. Wolff, grimly. "These

John Cave

home icemakers will cost from five to twenty-five dollars apiece, according to their size, and they will produce from ten to a hundred pounds of ice a day at a cost of five cents a hundred pounds — twenty pounds of ice for one cent. Everybody will want them." Mr. Wolff smiled. "The only thing that worries me is, what will become of the poor old Ice Trust?"

"Oh, don't let that worry you," John exclaimed. "But who is the inventor of this wonderful machine?"

"I am," said Mr. Wolff. "We'll keep my name out of it, though. We'll call the inventor Jabez Sparhawk. He is my entry clerk."

"I'd like to see it working. I'd get some points from it, you know — some points for my ads."

"All right; you can see it," said Mr. Wolff. He frowned. "It ain't quite perfected yet. It makes a good grade of ice, only the cost is sixty-seven cents a pound. That's too high, eh?"

The young man blushed. He laughed uncomfortably. He might have known from the first that the home icemaker was a fraud. Wolff, after chuckling a little, resumed in his rich voice:

"We won't mention that the machine ain't perfected. We'll advertise it as making ice at a twentieth of a cent a pound — twenty pounds for one cent is the best way to put it — and we'll take

John Cave

our chance on bringing down the cost to that in time. We ought to do it, oughtn't we?"

"I think so," said the young man. He mused a little, smiling. "Could we exhibit the machine making ice?"

"We might," said Wolff. "That's a good idea. I'll look into it."

He rose to go. "Roberts has all the facts," he panted. "Get a move on now. Offer the stock at a dollar a share everywhere. Everywhere."

With Wolff's capital John lied about the Jabez Sparhawk home icemaker as he had never lied before. On all sides his lies appeared, and from all sides subscriptions for the stock poured in. They were small subscriptions, running from five up to fifty dollars, and most of them came from dress-makers, weavers, saleswomen, carpenters — postal notes for money earned by the hands' hard work through long and weary hours.

In a basement down town the icemaker was to be seen in action. It made excellent ice, and, since no one knew that every pound cost sixty-seven cents, its performances dazzled the spectators, sending them home for their savings at the double quick.

In every advertisement appeared a full-length photograph of Jabez Sparhawk, frock coated, earnest, striking his palm with his clenched fist; and

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in capitals beneath the photograph Sparhawk said:

"Come in with me on this.

"I have made millions for investors, but my Ice-maker is the biggest thing I have invented yet.

"No one ever lost a cent through me. If so, I will make it good.

"I invented the electric fan.

"I invented the trolley car.

"I invented the automobile (gasoline and electric), just as it is run all over the world to-day.

"Those were good inventions, but my Home Ice-maker will break the record of all of them combined, and I want you to come in with me on this deal, so that we can flood the market in the spring, and put the Ice Trust out of business.

"Think of it! A HOME ICEMAKER! Like an icecream freezer, only simpler. And self-running — no handle to turn. You just fill it up with water before you go to bed, and in the morning there's your cake of ice. A great big cake of crystal pure ice, twenty pounds of it, for one cent.

"Remember, this stock, now one dollar a share, jumps to two on Saturday night at midnight."

Half-page advertisements of the home icemaker appeared day after day in every city. The public

John Cave

may have wondered why the stock never jumped on Saturday night; it may have doubted that Sparhawk was the inventor of the trolley car, the automobile and the electric fan; but nevertheless it bought eagerly. In larger and larger waves the subscriptions rolled in.

And one night, as John Cave sat at his desk reading and smoking, Roberts laid before him a cheque for fifteen hundred dollars.

"The home icemaker campaign is over," Roberts said, "and this is your share of the profits."

John took out his cheque-book. He regarded his bank balance with a smile. Then he slowly added the fifteen hundred dollars to it. And musing and smiling over the resultant total, he murmured:

"I shall be going abroad soon."

CHAPTER V

PRUDENCE's telegram arrived the following week.

"In trouble please come over."

It was noon when he rang her bell, but the maid said:

"She isn't up yet, sir. I'll call her."

Sniffing and frowning, he entered the library. The air was bitter — the bitter odour of opium — and the room was in disorder, with cushions piled in the middle of the floor, empty coffee cups and plates of half-eaten fruit on the chairs, cigarette stubs everywhere. He regarded the bright cushions. They were sprinkled with tiny black cinders, the charred and broken pills discarded from the opium pipe.

Prudence entered, walking slowly, stumbling a little, with glazed eyes. Her gown of apple green silk was so long that it tripped her. Stumbling over a cushion, she laughed and lifted the gown above her gilt shoes. She was thin and pale, and the scarlet was faded from her lips.

"How well you look," she said. "I suppose I

John Cave

look far from well myself. You can guess why." And with a rueful smile she indicated the disorder of the room, and sat down yawning.

"Poor old girl," said he.

She yawned behind her pale hand. "Oh, I don't know. We had a rather jolly evening. We kept it up till five."

"Till five!" He regarded her curiously. She seemed almost asleep there in her chair. Then his gaze wandered to the soiled plates and cups again.

"Stop looking like that, John Cave!"

"Does it annoy you?"

"It doesn't gratify me." She rang the bell. "Clear these things away, please; and bring me a half bottle of champagne."

Nestling in the big chair in her gown of apple green silk, she waited, yawning, gazing at him drowsily, smiling drowsy smiles. Her chin rested on her drawn-up knees, below her knees her hands were clasped, her gilt shoes on the chair seat peeped from beneath embroidered folds.

When the champagne came she rose, and with supple strides, still stumbling over the long gown, she advanced to the table on which the bottle stood. She unloosed the gold foil and the wire; with absorbed, considering eyes she manipulated the cork delicately; all of a sudden — plop — the cork shot out, and from the bottle mouth a kind of fume

John Cave

ascended; but of the volatile champagne itself not a drop escaped.

"There," she said. "Give me your glass."

He laughed awkwardly. "Thanks; it's so early, isn't it?"

Her eyes opened wide in surprise, but she said nothing. She took a great goblet, poured into it an inch of liqueur brandy, then filled it to the brim with wine. She held the hissing, foaming, amber-coloured draught high in air; she regarded it sleepily.

"What a drink!" she said, with a drowsy laugh, and she drank thirstily, yet gracefully, like a stage bacchante.

Then the pallor of her cheeks became rose, the wonted scarlet returned to her lips, and her eyes grew bright and clear.

"Now you are yourself," said he. "What is this trouble you are in?"

"I am a thief," she said. "I have stolen a thousand dollars."

"You? Impossible!"

"It is true."

"How on earth did it happen?"

"He left a thousand dollars with me. He was going West for a month, and I was to take the money to his broker's when he telegraphed." She paused, laughing a little. "I was interested in a

John Cave

certain stock myself," she said. "I expected it to double in two days. So I invested his thousand in my stock, and it . . . it was a swindle."

He paced the floor, frowning. "Why on earth did you do it?"

"Because," she answered calmly, "I expected to have two thousand by the time the telegram came."

"What stock was it?"

"Home Icemaker."

"What!" He paused before her, searching her face. He could not believe it.

"Are you joking?" he said at last.

"Joking?" She laughed, peal on peal. Could she be joking, after all?

"I wish I were joking," she said soberly.

"Why did you laugh, then?"

"You looked so queer."

"Oh! . . . Has he telegraphed yet?"

"I expect a telegram to-morrow."

He sat with bowed head. "What is to be done?" he muttered. His eyes, clouded and irresolute, sent shifty glances about the floor. Then, suddenly, he drew himself up, his brow cleared, and he said in a kind voice:

"I'll lend you the money."

"You?"

"Oh, I'm getting on."

"What are you doing?"

John Cave

"I am in the advertising business."

"Then let me show you my advertisement."

She took from a book the half page of a newspaper, unfolded it, and revealed one of his home icemaker productions.

"Do you see that?" she said. "What do you think of the liars and thieves who would write a thing like that?"

"Horrible."

"That is what caught me," she said, and laughing bitterly, she pointed to the line: "Remember, this stock, now one dollar a share, jumps to two on Saturday night at midnight."

"I'll lend you the money," muttered the young man.

"Indeed you'll not," said she. "If I wanted to borrow money, it wouldn't be to you I'd come. Listen," she went on; "this is what I want you to do. I want you to go to the office of these people in New York, and try to frighten them into giving me my thousand back. Say I know they're swindlers. Say you're a newspaper man, and will expose them. Say I'll have them arrested. I'll sue them. Will you?"

"Of course I will." He took up his hat and coat. "You'll get your money back, never fear."

"But you're not going?"

"I must. There's no time to be lost." He

John Cave

looked at his watch. "I can just make the one o'clock train."

She rose and gave him her hand. "How good you are."

That night he telegraphed her a thousand dollars with the explanation:

"Frightened them easily into disgorging."

And on Roberts's return, rising from his desk and pacing the room, he said:

"I'm going to give up this business."

"What for, you ass?"

"Too many lies."

"But," said Roberts, "all advertisement writers lie."

"Well, what excuse is that?"

"A good excuse. For instance, it is wrong to kill; but in war, where everyone is killing, then it isn't wrong."

"I wouldn't go to war," said the young man.

"You're a queer mixture. If you leave me, what will you do?"

"Return to syndicating again."

"Syndicating! And you talk about lies!"

"Harmless lies, Alonzo."

CHAPTER VI

HE awoke at seven, and immediately the thought flashed through his mind:

“To-day I sail for Europe.”

Like a catapult this joyous thought shot him from the bed, and he ran and looked out of the open window. How cold and pure and sparkling was the air of the November morning. The roofs were white with frost, the sun's gold rays slanted down on the frozen grey mud of the street, and the mud already, here and there, was turning soft and black for the day.

“Fine weather for getting off,” he murmured, stropping a razor briskly.

His last American breakfast was delightful. There was plenty of time, and with a newspaper propped before him he lingered over the cold and acid grapefruit, the delicately fresh eggs, the ham grilled in sweet, crisp slices, and the coffee so strong and rich that a kind of oil gleamed on its surface.

Then through crowded and sunny streets he strolled towards the pier, pausing now to choose some magazines and books, now to buy some

John Cave

cigarettes, and as soon as he got aboard the busy boat he hurried with his parcels to his stateroom.

It was a bright and spacious outside room, with a table, a couch, even a closet. Changing his hat for a cap, he selected a novel from his store, and ran up on deck again, the book under his arm.

The deck was filled with people. A bell rang, seamen shouted, more than half the people disembarked, and amid a mournful blare of whistles, a great fluttering of handkerchiefs, some tears, the steamer was pushed slowly out into midstream. Then her tug drew free, and she began to throb with the rhythmical and powerful strokes of those huge engines that for two weeks would not cease their labour day or night.

John, leaning over the side, inhaled with delight the strong, pure wind that beat upon the ship as she moved down the sunlit river towards the shining sea.

The great sea wind. . . . The wild, pure sea wind. . . . He would never weary of it. To him it would never be less sweet and strange than now. He stood day after day bareheaded in the bow, his gaze roved over the blue turmoil of restless water, the sun warmed him, the sea wind beat upon his face, and splendid thoughts, such as music creates, rose in his heart . . . wild, beautiful thoughts. . . .

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He had done pretty well at syndicating in New York, and in his lofty rooms, with their white and delicate woodwork and their abundance of clear light, the summer had passed pleasantly while he made photographs, developed negatives, type-wrote and manifolded his stupendous and harmless lies.

Sometimes he went to see Prudence. Though still beautiful, she seemed to be growing thinner, paler; and when he took her out to dine she swallowed morphine tablets every half-hour or so, and between the courses of the dinner she withdrew yawning to the women's dressing-room to smoke cigarettes.

Once, on her return from the women's dressing-room, he said:

"Stop hitting the pipe."

She smiled strangely. "What if I can't?"

"Nonsense!"

"What if I told you I had tried and found I couldn't?"

He hesitated between anxiety and disbelief. Blowing a cloud of smoke, he looked gloomily away. An orchestra of girls in red gowns was playing the *Marche Funèbre*. Vaguely depressed, he let his head sink on his bosom.

"I was only joking," said Prudence hurriedly, and she leaned forward across the table, and laid

John Cave

her hand lightly on his for an instant. She laughed. "I wanted to see if you'd care," she said, as she withdrew her hand.

"You knew I'd care," said he. He took a long breath. He was immensely relieved. "Stop it, will you?" he asked, smiling at her.

"Do you want me to?"

"Of course I do."

"Then I will."

But she did not. He found her, the next time he came over, hiding away her glistening lay-out. He paused on the threshold, frowning. She looked round and laughed as she knelt before the drawer.

"Caught," she said.

"Oh, well, it is none of my business, I suppose," said he. "Only . . ."

"Only what?"

Still kneeling, she bowed her head. Her back was to him. She seemed to be intently listening, waiting.

"Only what?" she whispered.

"Only," he said, "it hurts me to see a girl like you . . . so young and . . . it hurts me . . ."

She rose, laughing. "I'll stop," she said. "I mean it this time." And still laughing, she lighted a cigarette, and drew the smoke deep, deep into her lungs, blowing it forth in pale clouds.

But she could not stop.

John Cave

"She can't stop, sir," Marie, at the door, said hurriedly as she let him out.

"What?"

The trimmest of figures in her black gown, with its snowy wristbands and broad white collar, Marie bowed her face in her hands.

"What?" he repeated.

"She can't stop, sir. She tried and tried. It was pitiable. And at last she went quite out of her head. They say to stop will kill her."

"How kill her?"

"The lungs, sir. All those girls who come here from Chinatown have lung trouble."

He walked soberly away. He had sometimes wondered what in the end became of girls like Prudence. Now, it seemed, he was to know.

But he forgot her when Diana wrote.

Diana wrote from Capri. Her letter decided him at once to go abroad.

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In a silent and motionless row, reclining on their backs with upturned, immobile faces, the passengers, wrapped in their bright rugs, resembled a line of mummies in a museum.

From the galley puffs of warm air, laden with stale odours of food, floated sluggishly about them,

John Cave

and, a little seasick, they grew pale, their nostrils quivered, and they gulped.

They sailed on a cold day, amid sharp winds, sunshine and ice, and forty-eight hours later they plunged into a strange region of blue-grey vapours. Mists hid the sky. Mists rose out of the sea. In the oppressive heat they panted:

“Is this the ocean? It is more like an African swamp.”

“It is the Gulf Stream,” said the wiseacres. “It is always so in the Gulf Stream.”

And since there was no wind to blow away the smoke, the coal dust fell continually from it—a silent black snow that settled in their hair—and their footsteps on the black deck gave forth a crunching sound.

But as soon as they drew out the Gulf Stream the air became light and dry again, the coal dust disappeared, and the sun shone from a sky of pure and stainless blue. Soon the bright November days were like June days at home.

Naples drew near, and the passengers talked only of tips. Everywhere little groups debated in low tones the proper tip to give the deck steward, the tip for the stateroom steward, what the bath steward should get, and what the boots.

At last, their tips all distributed, they disem-

John Cave

barked. A whirlwind of cries and dust received them. One by one, with their parcels, they were swallowed up in a mob of raving Neapolitan scarecrows.

As John Cave stepped on the quay, one man tore his typewriter from his grasp, and a second seized his copying machine and camera. He attempted to expostulate. The men grinned and jabbered in his face, and with wild gestures turned and plunged into the press. Following, he fought his way to a huge and grimy building.

Here the other passengers in time arrived. They had their hand luggage, but where were their trunks? They loitered about for half an hour or so, consulting one another with anxious smiles, and finally they plunged into the mob outside once more.

Old ladies, mild and frail, struggled among ragged wharf-rats and scrambled over mountains of boxes. Feeble greybeards, travelling for rest, strained at huge crates in a desperate effort to see the trunks beneath. John Cave ran to and fro almost hysterically. Could his boxes have been left behind?

Finally they got their belongings assembled in the vast and grimy hall. Trunks and bags and rugs lay everywhere in little heaps, and on each

John Cave

heap sat a tourist, bedraggled and flushed, waiting for the customs officer.

And in a circle around them porters and guides and hotel runners stormed fiercely, with passionate gestures, in an unknown tongue. They regarded that mob in silence. A wisp of cobweb hung from the shoulder of a Philadelphia clubman. The mother of an English duchess had a black smear across her chin. Seated in the vast grey building on their luggage, helpless, bedraggled, cowed, they resembled a party of immigrants in an American railway station.

CHAPTER VII

A LITTLE steamer landed him the next evening at Capri. The moon had not yet risen. The island was dark as a cave. He stumbled up a steep, black, lonely road, and at last came blinking into the brilliant court of the Grand Hotel.

After dinner, guided by a boy with a lantern, he set out to see Diana.

Up, always up, the road wound, changing itself, where the mountain-side became precipitous, into stone steps, then resuming, as a road, its upward way. How steep and dark it was. He panted. He stumbled continually. Was the villa among the stars?

The moon rose, the blackness changed to vitreous blue, and pointing upwards, the boy said:

“Stellamaris, signor.”

And John saw, between himself and the moon, many lighted windows, palm-trees dishevelled and black, pale, vague architecture, uprising terraces, and the faint gleam of statuary.

The boy led him in through a gateway in a clipped hedge. They ascended from terrace to terrace, mounting flight after flight of worn stone

John Cave

steps. The air was sweet with heliotrope: heliotrope, luxuriant as ivy, entwined the stone balustrades, half hiding their crumbled carvings. Finally they came out upon a broad piazza whose floor of black and white marble shimmered like ice under the moon.

A servant took his name, and Diana came to him at once. Alone, dressed in white, she advanced with swift, girlish grace. Her troubled eyes were fixed on his timidly.

And as he went to meet her, fear, embarrassment, doubt, all ugly thoughts died in his breast, and he was conscious of a profound reverence, a profound pity, for this girl who put her life confidently in his weak hands.

"Dearest," he said.

"Dearest," she whispered tremulously.

Side by side they paced the long hall. Its floor of faded and uneven mosaic was covered with Persian rugs, and fragments of statuary from the imperial villa were set in the rose-coloured stucco of the walls. Diana said that as soon as he had seen her aunt they would walk in the moonlight on the balcony. But he frowned, dreading her aunt.

Yet the interview was brief. "The young," said Mrs. Scarlett, "think they know best." She regarded him with shrewd, kind eyes.

"I am beginning to feel very old," said he.

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"Marriage," she said, "is not what the young . . . it is a different thing. . . ." Her eyes contemplated something remote, hidden and inexplicable. She hesitated, frowning; she seemed to be seeking words wherewith to tell a difficult secret; then suddenly she smiled and turned to her niece. "But it is pleasanter on the balcony," she said.

On the balcony the December night was mild like May. Far below lay the sea, faintly luminous, shivering in the moonlight; and behind the villa a black crag rose up into the stars.

"Tell me your plans," said Diana.

"Plans!"

He clenched his fists and shook them above his head.

"Plans! They seem hopeless now. I shall add another failure to my long list, go broke, and be sent home in the steerage by some charitable consul."

"You are the same John Cave."

"But everything goes wrong. We'll never be able to marry."

"Nonsense," she murmured tenderly.

Taking heart, he told her of the interviews, illustrated with photographs, that he hoped to secure with kings, with inventors, poets, aeronauts. They would be difficult to secure, but he could do

John Cave

nothing at home—he had quite run out of good ideas.

A turn of the porch revealed Naples, a bed of golden light; and high above Naples a cluster of great lamps seemed to be threaded on a slanting cord. They were red, yellow, blue, green, a dozen or more, strung one above the other. Suddenly they united; it was as if the cord had taken fire; a tongue of flame curled up and disappeared, and a shower of sparks sifted softly down.

“Vesuvius,” said Diana.

“Vesuvius,” he repeated, pleased and awed.

She leaned over the balcony. The moon shone on a thicket of orange-trees. The ripe fruit glimmered faintly.

“Do you see the oranges?” she said.
“Lamps of gold in a green night.”

“Whose place is that?” he asked, pointing upward.

“That is Mr. Schuyler’s villa.”

“Peter Schuyler’s?”

“The famous Peter Schuyler’s.”

“I wish I had Schuyler’s money. I wonder why he turned Englishman?”

“Why don’t you ask him?”

The young man laughed. “Yes; why don’t I?”

“Wouldn’t that make a good story for you?”

John Cave

she persisted. "An interview with Mr. Schuyler, telling why he abandoned his country?"

"Superb," he said. "Tremendous. Such a story would run over America like wildfire. It would be the making of me." He laughed again. "But I could never get such a story," he concluded.

In a country of incredibly great fortunes, Peter Schuyler had inherited one of the greatest. He was as well known as a king. . . . John thought of his strange life. For all his wealth, he had worked hard. He had worked hard at college, winning many prizes. He had worked hard at letters, writing three or four novels of undoubted merit. In politics he had worked hard: he had been in turn a congressman, a senator, an ambassador: and just as his appointment to a cabinet office seemed assured, he had incensed his country beyond measure by turning Englishman. . . . Why had he turned Englishman? The newspapers had tried to interview him on that point in vain. Hundreds of reporters had been repulsed from his door. Why had Schuyler turned Englishman? That was an uncovered assignment in every correspondent's notebook. To get that story was every correspondent's golden and impossible dream. . . .

"I can't interview Schuyler," John repeated.

"Oh, you must try," said Diana.

John Cave

"I'll try. It will be useless, though."

"I'll help you," said the girl.

"Do you know him?"

"Oh, very well indeed. I'll introduce you."

"When?"

"To-morrow. To-morrow morning."

He took her hands, laughing excitedly.

"But we are bound to fail," he said.

CHAPTER VIII

"You are a distant relative of mine, you know," Mr. Peter Schuyler said to the young girl. "I suppose it is my duty to help you."

He hesitated. Hope flickered in his petitioners' troubled eyes. Leaning against his desk-top, he nodded and smiled at them.

"Your confidence has moved me," he said. "I wish you success, speedy success, a speedy marriage."

At this they bowed slightly, but their clouded brows did not yet clear.

"At the same time . . ."

"At the same time?" breathed Diana.

Mr. Schuyler seemed a little worried, a little annoyed, but he continued to smile gallantly; a tall, shambling figure in loose brown clothes, forty-five or so, sunburnt and ruddy, with dark hair brushed till it glistened like a silk hat.

"I consent," he said suddenly, and with a sour laugh he seated himself in his desk chair.

John and Diana exchanged a quick glance. Unconsciously they leaned back in easier postures, and they exhaled a long breath—a quiet sigh—of

John Cave

relief, gratitude, triumph. For an hour they had argued and pleaded, but the young man knew well that it was to Diana, not to him, their victory was due. He got out paper and pencil.

“I want to thank ——”

“Never mind that,” said Mr. Schuyler impatiently.

Diana walked out on to the balcony. She leaned her arms on the sun-warmed marble of the balustrade and looked down. The balcony overhung the cliff, and like a wall the golden-brown cliff dropped two thousand feet to the sea. She shuddered: she seemed to be looking down from a balloon. But the colour, down there in the cool shadow, the gold of the cliff, the deep, deep blue of the water, was ineffably beautiful. It thrilled the heart like music. . . . A white gull flew by, turning its head stiffly to regard her with vacant eyes.

“Why,” John was saying on her return, “why did you renounce your American citizenship to become an English citizen?”

“Because England is a free country,” Mr. Schuyler answered, “and I love freedom.”

“Isn't America a free country?”

“No. America is a despotic country.”

The pencil scrawled busily. The young man said:

John Cave

“Who is the despot?”

“The American,” said Mr. Schuyler, “is not oppressed by one despot, but by a hundred. He is oppressed by the railroads, by the newspapers, by the trusts—a body of cruel and wicked men, a body of anarchists.”

“Anarchists?”

“Anarchists. For they have stolen the government out of the people’s hands, and in their own ruthless and powerful hands no man’s reputation or life is safe.”

Mr. Schuyler stretched out his long legs, and clasped his long brown fingers behind his head.

“The American newspapers wrecked my uncle’s reputation,” he said, “and they have done a good deal towards wrecking mine. The railroads killed one of my best friends. Embalmed beef poisoned my godson in Cuba.

“The old-fashioned, considerate anarchists,” he went on, “kill every century two or three kings whom they have grown tired of supporting. Our ruthless American anarchists kill every year thousands that have been supporting them.”

“How?”

“In their factories, where their hands either contract mortal diseases because the surroundings are abominably unhealthy, or are slain outright because proper safeguards are not set about the ma-

John Cave

chines. On their railroads, which they keep flimsy, antiquated, undermanned, with what slaughter you know. In their great food plants, where they adulterate with dyes and acids the foods they prepare, careless of the deaths from poison that follow."

He ran his hands up and down the back of his head, and the effect was as though the nap of a silk hat had been rumpled.

"They have to choose," he said, "between reducing the population and reducing the profit. They choose to reduce the population."

"What have you got to say about our railroads?" John asked.

"They are a red stain on civilisation. They kill and maim a hundred and twenty-five thousand people a year."

Very much excited, Mr. Schuyler began to pace the floor.

"Our railroads could be made safe," he said. "The railroads of Europe are safe. Yes, they could be made safe easily. But a safe railroad costs far more to conduct than a dangerous one. A safe railroad pays but a reasonable profit.

"Our railroads' profit is exorbitant. If they did not gain this profit, they could not pay dividends on their billions of dollars of watered stock. Run them safely, and their exorbitant profit would fall

John Cave

to a just one. 'Rather than suffer such a loss,' the railroads say, 'we will keep on killing and maiming our annual hundred and twenty-five thousand, for no law has yet been formulated to check this slaughter of ours.'"

"What about our newspapers?" said the young man.

"Our newspapers!" With a loud laugh Mr. Schuyler returned to his chair, and clasped his hands behind his head again. "Our newspapers!"

"Well?" said Diana, frowning.

"I admit," said Mr. Schuyler, "that the literary quality of the leaders in *The New York Dispatch* is good. But taking our newspapers as a whole, I think they are the cruellest, the vulgarest, the lewdest newspapers in the world. It was their treatment of my uncle that decided me to leave America for good. I'll tell you about it."

John bent over his notes, anxious not to miss a word.

"Don't take this down," said Mr. Schuyler sternly.

"Oh!" The young man, with an embarrassed smile, leaned back in his chair. Diana sauntered out on to the balcony. Mr. Schuyler began:

"My uncle fell foul of the newspapers in his old age. He had lived a good and noble life. His

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learning and his philanthropy had made him almost famous. But at sixty-five he contracted an unfortunate marriage.

"His young wife, some months after this marriage, sailed for Cherbourg alone, and the next day the reporters swooped down.

"I happened to be visiting my uncle at the time. I sat in his library with him when he decided to see the dozen reporters waiting below. It was horrible, the half-hour that followed.

"The reporters crowded into the room with the swagger that our colleges stamp on young men. I remember their soiled boots, their cheap, pretentious and untidy dress, and the brown bristles sticking out of their thin, pale cheeks. They needed bathing, shaving, shampooing, brushing, exercise, a dozen things.

"Those in advance hung back, those behind pushed forward. They seemed a little frightened, a little ashamed, a little amused. Their air surprised me. I thought they had come merely to ask my uncle something about his new hospital.

"The thin old man rose. He was exquisite with his white hair, his fine linen, his orchid *boutonnière*, his frock coat with its old-fashioned velvet collar. Greeting the reporters, he resembled a steel engraving of some famous statesman of the past. But they fell on him without pity.

John Cave

“‘Is it true you’re going to get a divorce?’

“I saw an odd flush stain his white, soft cheek. He rested his trembling hand on the table. He said that he could not discuss with them a subject of that nature.

“They nudged one another, whispered, nodded. A lad with red hair spoke up:

“‘There’s a scandal about you and your wife we’re going to print to-morrow. You had better let us tell you what it is, so that you can deny it if it isn’t true.’

“He should have told them to go, but he was dumbfounded. Slender and straight in his chair, he looked at them helplessly. They took his silence for consent, and began to bespatter him with vile gossip, gathered heaven knows where.

“‘Are you acquainted with John Mack?’

“‘Didn’t your wife hire John Mack as a groom?’

“‘They say she used to take all-day drives in the country with him alone. Is that true?’

“My uncle winced and shuddered as though each question had been a well-aimed handful of mud. I should have interfered. It was all happening, though, so quickly.

“‘Did you make Mack your valet and take him out of livery?’

“‘Did he dine with you?’

“‘They say that once, in your private car, Mack

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and your wife sat whispering in a corner all the evening. They say you called the attention of the rest of the party to what was going on; you said, "They'll both be glad when I'm dead." Is that true?'

"One after another these boys hurled pitilessly their vile questions at the old man.

"'I can say nothing, gentlemen.' So he ended the interview. 'But I beg you,' he muttered, 'I beg you not to print this scandal.'

"They trooped out chattering. With a groan he sat down before the fire. He could not look at me. I could not look at him.

"They printed all the scandal and more. Column after column, day after day, they printed their filth.

"There was very little truth in it all — some truth, perhaps, but very little. I myself don't know the history of my uncle's wretched marriage. It was a subject that I, that all his friends, never thought of bringing up before him. And yet those reporters . . .

"They made the honourable old age of this philanthropist, this endower of universities, this writer of learned books, a laughing-stock the country over. He resigned all his offices. He retired, broken-hearted, to his house in the country. There he soon died."

John Cave

Mr. Schuyler began to pace the floor again.

"The freedom of the press," he said. "That is what the freedom of the press has come to in America. We regard France as vicious. And in France, the other day, a duke killed his wife and her paramour and then killed himself, and the French press gave to the tragedy one brief paragraph. And the clean French law forbids, in divorce court reports, the publication of a single name."

John mused a while. "What other objection have you to America?"

"I object to our 'spread-eagleism.'"

"Spread-eagleism?"

"Ignorant conceit. In our ignorant conceit we declare that America is the greatest country in the world. 'Greatest in what?' someone asks us. 'Greatest in everything,' we answer calmly. What a lie!"

With a chuckle Mr. Schuyler rose and lighted a cigarette. He pushed the box towards John, and sauntered to the window. Standing there, his eyes on the glittering seascape, he resumed:

"What a lie! Are we greatest in literature, in painting, in sculpture, in architecture, in music? Oh, no. We admit we are not greatest, but least, in the arts. But, then, you know, we incline to sneer at the arts in America. We incline to re-

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gard the arts as effeminate. 'Business,' we say, 'business, machinery, manufactures — those are the important things of life, and we challenge the world in them.'

"Well, the world can take up our challenge. What of motor cars? Can America produce motor cars like those of France, Germany, or Italy? What of watches? If you want a fine watch, don't you buy a Swiss one? Take fabrics, fabrics for men's clothes, say. All our fine, soft, beautiful fabrics are imported from England. Take ship-building. The luxurious, swift and famous ships that break the records and charge the highest fares are all built in England or Germany. Take furniture. It is from France that fine furniture comes. Take dressmaking and tailoring. Are not the Paris dressmakers for women and the London tailors for men superior to ours, setting the fashions that we burlesque afterwards?"

Mr. Schuyler turned from the window. His glance lingered on John Cave's padded shoulders, and with a smile he continued:

"So, interminably, I could go on, till at last you would ask me in what, with all our spread-eagle boasts, we really do excel. That question is easy to answer. We excel in counterfeiting. We excel in making worthless imitations of valuable and beautiful things.

John Cave

"Visit an American cloth mill. You find that it is getting daily from Europe samples of new ideas in cloth—durable, comely cloth, woven of pure wool and dyed with costly dyes. These samples are hurried to a big room in the mill, and a number of men pick them to pieces, study their construction, and proceed to make counterfeits of them.

"They take old coats, cast-off stockings, worn-out underwear, all manner of filthy rags, and grind them up into fluff. They soak this fluff with oil, and it has then consistency enough to be spun into thread. They dye the thread with cheap dyes that rub off on the hand like flour. Then they weave it gently, for it is as frail as cobweb, into a counterfeit cloth as worthless as a counterfeit half-dollar.

"Our cloth factories are counterfeiting plants, and they are typical of our other factories. They, too, are counterfeiting plants, flooding the market with counterfeit boots made of paper, counterfeit brandy made of wood alcohol, counterfeit sausages made of ground potato peelings, counterfeit drugs made of flour, counterfeit life-preservers brought up to standard weight by means of leaden balls concealed in the cork.

"Leaded life-preservers," he slowly repeated. "Leaded life-preservers. . . . The American business ideal."

CHAPTER IX

DESPAIR overcame him on the long ride to Rome. It was preposterous that he, an unknown foreigner, should dream of interviewing the Pope and the King. Why not abandon everything and return forthwith to America?

But he had not enough money to return. Taking out his wallet, he counted his packet of bank-notes. There was a little more than he had thought, and his spirits rose.

The Schuyler story might be a success. It had been written with the utmost care. He had expressed all Schuyler's views without showing either sympathy or antipathy for them. The story was very calm.

And Schuyler had read and corrected it, and had dictated a note of approval that the young man used as preface:

"I certify to the accuracy of the following interview by Mr. John Cave."

He had selected a thousand American papers to which to submit the story, and he had been very arrogant with these papers in his letter.

Why had he been so arrogant? Perhaps the

John Cave

American press would not dare to print such a strong attack upon America. But he was sure it would. And he had done well to set the price of the story high — from twenty-five dollars down to five — nothing below five.

So hope returned again. He reproached himself for having thought of flight. What a champion, to think of flight, with his lady looking on; to strike one blow and then, his lady looking on, to turn and run before even seeing the blow's effect.

In Rome the next morning he entered the American Embassy bravely.

"I'd like to see the Ambassador," he said, presenting his card.

"Have you a letter of introduction?" the clerk asked.

"No. I am a newspaper writer."

"Oh," said the clerk. "I guess, though, you had better tell me what your business with the Ambassador is."

John cleared his throat and said in a cracked voice:

"I want the Ambassador to help me interview the Pope and the King."

"Well, well!" The elderly clerk was impressed. "Just wait one minute." And he hobbled away.

John waited, wretchedly anxious; but soon the

John Cave

door opened again and a young man of distinguished aspect advanced with the visitor's card in his hand.

"Are you the Ambassador?"

"No," said the young man. "I am the Ambassador's secretary." He drew nearer. He scanned the card, then he extended it. "What can I do for you?" he said.

"I want to interview the Pope and the King," John answered. "I thought our Ambassador might help me with advice, or introductions or ——"

"Oh, impossible!" said the young man. His tone was shocked. He scanned the card again, and again extended it.

John took it humbly. This return of a card, this action implying repudiation and scorn, had often been practised on him in America. The subtle insult was popular amongst American snobs.

He took the card in the hope of gaining the secretary's favour, and thrusting it in his pocket, he said:

"Don't you think I might see the Ambassador?"

"It would be useless," answered the young man.

"Can't you, then, tell me," John appealed, "how one gains an audience with ——"

"Oh, no!" said the other. "Oh, no!"

John Cave

With a curt nod he vanished. He was a millionaire, and the power that inherited wealth gave him he thought was given him by mental and physical superiority. He went through life scattering insults among servants, waiters, shop assistants, among all the poor with whom he came in contact.

"Try the consul," said the old and shabby clerk, as John departed. "He'll fix you up."

But the consul had gone to Tivoli, and would not return till five. So John went back to his hotel.

His hotel, so splendid and cheap, so pretentious and unsatisfactory, bored him. In the gilded magnificence of its spacious, overheated public rooms, young American women lounged all day long with Italian officers. The proprietor, a handsome man of fifty-five or sixty, flirted continually in the halls' recesses with a Detroit spinster of middle age. Insolent waiters in handsome liveries served rank tea, weak coffee and adulterated liqueurs to the American ladies and their Italian cavaliers in the great, gilded salons, and the proprietor's wife, an old woman in a yellow wig, moved among her guests with an Italian officer always at her heels, ready for presentation to any American girl who sat alone.

After luncheon, at a little table by a window,

John Cave

John squared himself before his play resolutely. But he could not fix his mind upon the play. For an hour, his elbows on the manuscript, his head in his hands, he brooded. Then, with an oath, he rose and hurried out.

In his walk he passed palace after palace, cold, massive, gloomy buildings, like jails. The Corso, narrow and sunless, chilled him. How insignificant it was to have so great a name!

But suddenly the aspect of the Corso changed. Elegant idlers cropped up. Wardens in imposing liveries, with great staves upright in their hands, flung open the gates of the gloomy palaces, and forth from the palace courts swung superb victorias wherein lolled young women in pale toilets, their hair dyed and curled, and their faces delicately painted.

In an unending procession, in the narrow, sunless street, these sumptuous equipages dashed back and forth. The wardens with their staves stood erect and still before the palace gates. Their coats reached their ankles, and their staves were topped with gold balls. Old for the most part, ancient retainers with long white beards, day after day they gazed calmly upon this swift, magnificent pageant, this revel of the nobility of Rome.

John in his progress came out into the sunshine of a great square. A green hill bounded the

John Cave

square, and looking up, he saw a splendour of sun-drenched terraces, waving palms and plashing fountains. And on each terrace little black figures, cut sharp against the pure brilliance of the sky, leaned on stone balustrades and gazed out over the eternal city.

From right and left two roads wound up the hill. The carriages ascended slowly. Silver harness clinked. Beautiful, restive horses reared and tossed back foam upon their satin coats. And often, so great was the press, a dead halt came. Then the idlers thrust their faces almost into the carriages, but the ladies lolled on their cushions, calm and inscrutable under a thousand eyes.

At the top of the hill he found a little park of palms and flowers. A drive encircled it, a band played from a central pavilion, the carriages moved slowly round and round the drive, and the idlers lounged in the brilliant sunshine.

What could this place be? It was at any rate amusing. He lingered in its pleasant gaiety.

The band played "Trovatore," and the young women, circling slowly in their carriages, seemed an incarnation of the passionate, soft music. Dressed in pale hues, with their flushed, calm faces, their sables and their violets, they reminded him of actresses. Only among actresses had he ever

John Cave

seen such splendid toilets, such lustrous hair, such red lips, and such deep, clear, mysterious eyes.

But soon the sun sank, the air grew cold. Going to the edge of the terrace, he leaned on the balustrade. Rome lay below, and in the west a great dome floated, pale amid rosy clouds. . . .

"St. Peter's!" he murmured. "And the Pincio!" Pleased and surprised, he once more looked about him.

But the musicians had already gone. One by one the carriages departed. The Pincio lay cold and lonely in the evening light.

It was nearly five, and he hastened to the Consulate. The consul would return no more that day.

He saw the consul, however, the next morning.

"Such requests as yours are made continually to us," the consul said. "We couldn't help you unless you had the strongest kind of letters. You see, we don't know you. You might be an anarchist with a bomb."

"Give me some advice, at least," said the young man. "I have come all the way to Rome to get these interviews. How would you go about getting them in my place?"

The consul puffed at his cigar thoughtfully.

"Any friends here?" he said at last.

"None."

John Cave

"Where are you stopping?"

"At the Julio."

The consul smiled.

"Queer place, that."

"I thought it was a queer place," said the young man. "Who are all those Italian officers one finds up there?"

"That's it," said the consul. "Madame Julio runs a kind of matrimonial agency. She introduces poor Italians to American girls, and if a rich marriage is arranged, I believe there's a percentage."

"I thought it all very queer," said the young man. "However, about my interviews——"

"It all depends on yourself," said the consul. "It is all a matter of influence."

"Would a letter from Peter Schuyler have any influence?"

"A great deal. Get Schuyler to say a word to the Ambassador."

So he went back to the hotel and wrote to Peter Schuyler. He was ashamed, after what Schuyler had done for him, to ask another favour of the man, but with a grim smile he told himself that it was perhaps through brazen persistence such as this that worldly success was won.

That night after dinner he set out to see the Princess Coronica. She had been a New York girl.

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Perhaps she would help a fellow-countryman. But the princess had gone to the opera.

He tried to see her again the next afternoon. She was then motoring. She would be back, however, at six. While he waited he decided to do a little sightseeing.

Baedeker in hand, he climbed the Capitoline Hill, and from the eminence of the Via del Campidoglio looked down upon the broken marbles of the Forum's raw brown hole. Those broken marbles, ghastly as bones, failed to thrill him. Nevertheless, unfolding his map, he proceeded to identify various arches, temples and columns.

"The Temple of Concord, sir. The Temple of Castor and Pollux. The Arch of Titus."

A young Italian stood beside him, pointing to right and left with a thin, ragged arm. John turned away, but the young Italian followed, taking from beneath his cape a box of brown wood with three or four drawers.

"Mosaics, sir? Souvenir spoons? Brooches?"

And he opened one drawer after another, displaying a collection of cheap mosaic jewellery.

"No, thank you."

He hurried on, but three other young Italians intercepted him. The first offered him post-cards, the second offered albums of Roman photographs, the third offered old coins. All three had brown

John Cave

wooden boxes besides, which they opened as a last resort, imploring him to buy.

They annoyed him. Amid their clamour he could not fix his mind on the Forum's dismal ruins. So, to escape them, he made his way to the Colosseum.

But at the Colosseum again he was tormented. Guides, post-card vendors and the inevitable mosaic salesmen with their boxes formed a noisy circle about him. Wherever he went, this circle, like a bodyguard, enclosed him. He could not break through it. "Hell!" he said, and jumping into a carriage, he drove to the Vatican, only to find it closed for the day. But he saw the interior of St. Peter's, and its fresh white splendour reminded him of a new opera house.

The Princess Coronica had returned by six, but she declined to see her fellow-countryman.

Now, for a fortnight, John doggedly visited every person in Rome who might, by any chance, help him to interview either the King or the Pope. He saw forty persons in all; he got many rebuffs, many promises; but the promises were less sincere than the rebuffs. Still he kept up heart. He was determined to make a good show of perseverance before Diana and her aunt.

His funds, however, would not allow him to persevere eternally; nor could he see the advantage

John Cave

of eternal perseverance in a case so hopeless as this. He had heard nothing of the Schuyler story, but then it was still too early to hear. His recent letter to Schuyler had had no reply.

To Diana, who had gone to Nice, he now sent reports that grew always gloomier and gloomier. In reply to his last report she telegraphed:

“Why not come here and do Monte Carlo?”

He set out for Nice that evening. A compartment to himself, he lighted a cigarette, opened a new Tauchnitz, and lay back in his seat cosily. He liked travelling by night. He liked to rush all night long through the unknown darkness, nestled in a well-lighted carriage, a box of cigarettes at his side, a good book in his hand.

Rome had defeated him, but he was retreating towards a pleasant place.

If only his money were holding out a little better . . .

CHAPTER X

THE sunlight sparkled on ivory-coloured villas, on palms and orange-trees, on beautiful toilets, beds of flowers, a turquoise sea.

"So this is the Promenade des Anglais."

They sat near the jetty in the promenade's best hour, and the world's idlers strolled before them, an army of men and women who spared no pains to be, externally, beautiful and pure.

A gallant show. On the right a line of ivory-coloured villas, hotels and restaurants; on the left the sea; and, strolling up and down the promenade, men and women dressed as for a stage garden-party.

"Isn't it different," said Diana, "from a winter day at home?"

"Think of the home slush," said he, "the grey sky, the ulsters spattered with mud, the cold, raw winds."

They rose and sauntered on.

"*Venez voir! Venez voir!*" a great voice shouted from the beach.

"Oh," said Diana, "look! An octopus!"

Two fishermen had an octopus in a tub of water

John Cave

on the beach below. One let a tentacle fasten on his finger.

"Venez voir, m'sieu' 'dame!"

But John caught sight of a plate of coppers beside the tub.

"Don't look at that," he said. "It is too horrible."

And he hurried the interested girl away.

"Venez voir!" the fishermen called after them in disappointed tones.

Motor cars continually glided up to the promenade, and from them women in white descended for the morning walk.

"There is a Frenchman," said Diana. "I can tell him by his elongated boots."

"Look at those tall, thin Englishmen," said John. "The English are the best-dressed men in the world. How clean they are. But they seem cold, as if they were not quite dry from their last bath."

"And that young man is an American," said Diana mischievously. "Americans always have padded shoulders, they always need shaving, their boots are always soiled, and their clothes are always unbrushed. Slap an American on the back, and he'd disappear in a cloud of dust."

Noon sounded, and leaving her at her hotel, he set out on a shopping tour. He bought two eggs,

John Cave

a loaf, and a mutton chop. Then he went back to his room and cooked his luncheon over a spirit lamp. It was sad to cook and eat alone like that, but it could not be helped. Financially he was reduced to the worst straits.

Mrs. Scarlett had invited him to motor with them in the afternoon to Monte Carlo, and in the swift, luxurious car the ride in the golden weather was a delight. The road skirted the sea. White villas gleamed amid palm gardens. Sometimes, far to the north, they saw snow glistening on blue peaks.

At the Casino, strolling in halls of gilt and marble, under great pale paintings of nude women, they admired the strangely elegant gowns of the slim girls who sauntered, with lewd eyes, at the edge of the gambling throngs.

Mrs. Scarlett gave an hour to roulette. She won fifty francs. "Now," she said, "we'll have some tea."

Assenting with a ghastly smile, John led the way to a table by a window.

"Two teas."

But the ladies remonstrated. "Oh, you must have some tea."

"No, no; I never eat between meals."

"And when I'm hostess, too," cried Mrs. Scarlett. She pouted gaily. Her pretty eyes were

John Cave

shining. The roulette had made a young girl of her. "You might break your rule when I am hostess!"

He frowned: he had not been aware that she was hostess. But it was too late now to change his mind. They might suspect the reason.

Assuredly some money should soon arrive. The Schuyler story would appear on Sunday. He had written Roberts that he was hard up, that the first fifty dollars collected was to be cabled to him. How tired he was of all this solitary cooking!

So he mused as he hastened home for dinner with his hands full of packages—beefsteak, potatoes, bread, a pat of butter in a little bag. He boiled the potatoes and ate them while the steak cooked. The room was cold, the lamp gave but a dim light, and chewing disconsolately, his overcoat drawn round his shoulders, he mourned his wasted life.

That evening, from Mrs. Scarlett's box, he saw *Madama Butterfly*. His snowy shirt-front concealed a terror-stricken heart. He was continually fearful of some unforeseen expense which, with his eight francs, he would be unable to meet.

Between the acts girls selling sweets and ices went among the audience. To escape them he hurried from the box at every curtain-fall, explaining that he wished to smoke. He knew that this

John Cave

was the wrong thing to do, and Diana's glance of reproach and Mrs. Scarlett's puzzled frown depressed him.

But the next morning he was encouraged by a note from Alonzo Roberts.

"A few of the Schuyler stories have been returned," Roberts wrote, "but I have received a great many flattering letters. Altogether I think you are going to do extremely well. What else have you sent out?"

The letter was encouraging but vague. And that question, "What else have you sent out?" was a horrible reproach. For he had found nothing to write about in Monte Carlo, and he had not a single idea for any other stories.

His linen became a source of great annoyance. Finally he was reduced to his last collar. He wore the collar as little as possible. The moment he entered his room he removed it carefully and laid it away in a drawer. Nevertheless it gradually grew soiled.

Every morning, before putting it on, he rubbed it with a handkerchief. This seemed to bring back a little of its pallor. Once he moistened the handkerchief and essayed to wash away certain dark streaks. But the moisture removed the collar's gloss and raised several blisters on its surface; and with a low cry of alarm he hastily desisted.

John Cave

At the end he rubbed a little powder into the collar every morning. The powder undeniably was an improvement. Nevertheless the collar looked anything but fresh. It had a stale and sickly, a kind of livid hue, and on his walks he continually thought of it with pain, much as a hunchback thinks of his deformity.

He spent Sunday afternoon with Mrs. Scarlett and Diana at Monte Carlo again. The ladies lost a thousand francs; it was embarrassing that he could not play himself. On their departure the chauffeur met them at the Casino door, a look of distress on his face. The automobile had broken down. Should he rent another to take them back?

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Scarlett. "It is not worth while. Here is the electric tram. We'll return in that."

And she boarded the car that stood beside the Casino. John and Diana followed.

A terrible moment now ensued for the young man. With only seven sous, what was he to do? The car would start in a few minutes. Could he endure the mortification of letting Mrs. Scarlett pay his fare?

"By Jove," he said, "I forgot those post-cards." He rose hastily. "There is still time."

"Don't miss the car," Diana cautioned him.

"No fear," said he.

John Cave

He hid himself in the garden till the car was gone. Biting his lip nervously, he asked himself how far it was to Nice. He had a long walk before him; fifteen miles or more.

The sun sank as he left Monaco, and in passing Cap d'Ail he was very nearly run over. The stars came out at Eze, and the rest of the walk was in the dark: a darkness illumined fitfully by the great lamps of onrushing motor cars. He moved always in a cloud of dust created by innumerable cars, and amid the lightninglike flash of the lamps, the honk and shriek of the horns, he kept darting frantically from one side of the road to the other, like a moth that has blundered out of the night into a lighted room. At Beaulieu he finished his last cigarette. At Villefranche he lay down in despair under a tree to pass the night. But the ground was cold, and he soon rose and stumbled on again. A long, long walk.

White with dust, at last he entered Nice. He was faint with hunger and fatigue, yet what sort of a dinner could he get for seven sous?

A thought struck him. He would have an Irish stew. And pocketing his pride, he bought four sous' worth of meat, two sous' worth of potatoes and onions, and a sou's worth of bread.

The Irish stew was a success. It filled the frying-pan. It gave forth a ravishing odour. In his

John Cave

stocking feet the weary young man limped briskly about the dim, cold room, and when the stew was done, he ate it to the last mouthful, an overcoat across his knees. Then he smoked two cigarette-ends that he had found in the fireplace, and immediately went to bed.

He slept well, he awoke refreshed. The sunshine streamed into the room, and as he shaved, a telegram arrived.

He gave a cry of joy. It was, no doubt, the money from Roberts. And opening it, he read:

“Schuyler interview excellent will you join dispatch staff two hundred a week herkimer.”

He began to pace the floor. He made odd flourishes with the open razor in his hand. “Hurrah, hurrah,” he kept saying mechanically.

Then he resumed his dressing with frantic haste. Diana must know, Diana must share his ineffable happiness. He was powdering his sallow collar when he got another message, this time a notification from Cook’s that the money had come.

Roberts had cabled him five hundred dollars. He wired his acceptance of Herkimer’s offer. Then he hastened to Diana and her aunt.

It was very early, a beautiful morning, and in honour of his success they took an all-day motor

John Cave

ride. In the evening they saw *Thaïs* at the Casino, and they supped at midnight at the London House.

"So you are having great success," said Mrs. Scarlett. She sat alone with him before the fire in her salon.

"Great success for me," he answered. "But I owe it all to Diana."

"I am glad to hear you say that." In her silver-coloured gown the slim and graceful woman, with her young face and grey hair, gave him a long, clear look.

"It is the simple truth. Take the Schuyler interview. Diana not only suggested it, she got it as well; and the Schuyler interview is the cause of everything."

"Can you keep it up, do you think?"

"With Diana's help. Her help . . . her influence and advice. . . . I can't tell you what they mean to me."

She smiled rather sadly. Then she questioned him about his life, and he told her his squalid story.

"But don't think I liked it down there in the morass," he ended. "None of us like it down there. I wanted to climb out. But the effort, the great effort . . . it seemed hopeless, useless . . . till she came."

"Till she came," said Mrs. Scarlett, with her sad smile. "She came — and she will go."

John Cave

"What do you mean?"

"The girl she seems to you will go. The goddess will go. Then, desolate, will you sink back into the morass again?"

"The goddess will never go," said the young man.

"Ah, youth!" She smiled and sighed. "Ah, youth! youth!" Her shining gaze seemed full of pity.

CHAPTER XI

“ ‘ WIFE ’— I hate that word.”

“ And I hate the word ‘ husband.’ ”

“ Don’t ever call me ‘ wife.’ ”

“ And you must never call me ‘ husband,’ either.”

In that vague manner they expressed their loathing of the average marriage. Of the average marriage? Of the universal marriage. For neither had ever seen one marriage that seemed happy, desirable, more than endurable. A little uneasily Diana resumed:

“ Husband and wife. . . . But we are not to be like other husbands and wives, are we? ”

“ Never. Never.”

“ But I suppose they all say that in the beginning, eh? ”

“ It will come true in our case.”

And in his firm conviction of the immortality of this passion of theirs which, like alcohol or hasheesh, made life a thing of perfect beauty, of utter happiness, he smiled easily at her absurd fear, as one smiles at a child’s absurd fear of the dark.

“ I wish,” he said, “ that we could wander over the world all our lives.”

John Cave

"Ah, so do I," said she.

"We could, if the play succeeded. As for children . . ."

"No children," said Diana, her gaze fixed on the fire.

"No children," he repeated. He glanced at the delicate and pensive profile over which the firelight flowed, and his heart melted with tenderness. He desired above all things to make her life happy, to shield her from pain. "Children," he said, "would rob us of our freedom."

"We must keep free."

An attendant knocked and entered with a telegram.

"Oh, can auntie be ill?"

He opened the telegram and read:

"Prudence very low wants hundred cable instructions roberts."

Prudence . . . he had forgotten Prudence . . . and under Diana's gaze he grew warm and uncomfortable. He could hardly look up.

"Well?"

"Only a cable from Roberts," he said, slipping the little paper into his pocket.

"What does he say?"

"Dear, don't ask me."

John Cave

"Why not?"

"Because, because ——"

"It is bad news," she said. "You think it will make me unhappy. Has Herkimer ——"

"No, it is nothing like that. It is something that would pain you. Something in my past, dead now, but ——"

Her face grew cold, scornful, sad. "Let me see it," she said, extending her hand. And he gave it reluctantly to her.

He had put away that episode of his past; he had slain and buried and forgotten it. But it had burst the bonds of death, the bonds of the deep grave, the bonds of oblivion, as the past has a way of doing; and now it stalked grinning into this dim salon where he sat with his wife in the pure enjoyment of a beautiful honeymoon.

"Who is Prudence?"

"I'll tell you," he answered, "for since I am going to help her, you have a right to know. Otherwise ——"

"Why should you help her?"

"Because she has helped me. When I was ill she nursed me. She got me my berth on ——"

"Were you in love with her?"

"No."

"But you — but — she is not a good girl, is she?"

"She doesn't pretend to be a chaste girl."

John Cave

"Then you shall not help the wicked creature!"

"She isn't a wicked creature. She is brave and honourable."

"Honourable?"

"Honourable."

"But you said she was ——"

"Unchaste?"

"Yes."

"Chastity is nothing. There is no such thing."

He hesitated. From adolescence he had believed that chastity, chastity of thought as of deed, could not exist. And he still held this belief. Yet he must believe, to be happy, in the chastity of Diana.

She rose, and at the threshold of her bedroom, standing with her back to him, she said in a hard little voice:

"Do as you please. I don't care."

The door closed behind her.

CHAPTER XII

CHASTITY, after all, he found in marriage, in the husband and wife who loved one another, faithful in thought as in deed, he regarding all women and she regarding all men with calm eyes, cool and clear as the eyes of children.

He remained abroad a year. Herkimer sent him now to London, now to Vienna, now to Paris or Berlin — he followed the march of events literally. And in the clean and beneficent ways of marriage he worked well. He worked with a machinelike regularity, an unflagging enthusiasm, in strange contrast with the fitful work of the past.

The year sped in fashionable hotels, in *trains de luxe*, in splendid capitals, in gay watering-places, and its influence was manifest in the young couple's changed appearance. Diana soon came to be taken everywhere for a Parisienne, while John was taken for an Englishman. This error, when it was brought to their attention, caused them to smile with secret delight. Then Diana, turning with redoubled disgust from her American gowns, chose French apparel of a stranger elegance, a more bizarre grace. He even outdid the Londoner in the

John Cave

precision of his dress, invariably wearing in town dark, smooth, lustrous raiment, and, out of town, coloured clothes of rough, soft stuffs, with coloured collars and brown boots.

Diana shared no less in his work than in his pleasure. She had mastered both typewriter and camera, she typed all his manuscript, and when pictures were needed for an interview, accompanying her husband, she posed the celebrity while John questioned him.

Sometimes, late at night, laying down his pen, the young man would rise, light a cigarette, and pace the bright, still, busy room with happiness thrilling in his heart like music. He gazed at the slim figure at her desk, absorbed, grave and content; and he asked himself how it was possible that life, which he had found always ugly and sad, could give him now such clean and stimulating happiness as this. This must be but a brief episode in life. This could not last.

Frightened a little, he bent over her, and when she looked up with a tender smile, he put his arm about her and murmured in a sad voice:

“Dearest, let us love one another always.”

Laughing tremulously, lightly leaning for a moment her golden head against his breast, she sighed:

“Ah, we will, we will.”

But there was fear in his voice, a fear that, as

John Cave

the year waned, justified itself. He found that passion was cooling.

Passion was cooling. His eyes, no longer cold and pure, lingered now upon beautiful women, and he perceived that in his case marital chastity of thought as of deed had ceased to be involuntary, like breathing, but required, like uphill walking, a certain slight effort. And in Diana's case. . . . But he thrust the thought aside.

He had believed that passion, the sole source of perfect marital chastity, would never die. Would it in his case soon be dead? Was it already dead? Faithful in deed only, was he doomed to go through life crushing in his heart now this desire and now that? Then marriage had duped him.

Yet, duped or not, he was happy. He would be loyal. But Diana. . . . Again he thrust the thought aside.

CHAPTER XIII

LEAVING the *Dispatch* office early, he walked home in the cold blue dusk.

The still cold of the November evening filled him with an exquisite sense of youth, and he strode on more buoyantly in his lustrous London garb. Exhilarating thoughts rose like champagne bubbles in his mind, thoughts of success, money, praise. And then the memory of Mrs. Slocum caused him to smile.

The Slocums were to dine with them that night. Slocum he despised, but Marie Slocum was beautiful. . . .

The odour of violets filled the air, and entering the flower shop with a vague feeling of penitence, of pity, he bought Diana a great bouquet of purple blooms. Poor Diana! But she should never know his vagrom thoughts.

The dinner was a success. Everything appeared to succeed here in New York. Slocum opened his eyes at the simple *pommes soufflées*, and when the chef came in person to prepare the *caneton à la presse* in its big silver machine, the young millionaire could not conceal his crude awe.

John Cave

They returned to the drawing-room for coffee. Slocum and Diana chose the ottoman near the Hoyas portfolio, but Mrs. Slocum said that she was cold, and seating herself before the fire, she crossed her knees and smoked, one bare arm hanging listlessly over the chair-back.

Balancing his cup, he stood behind her. Hers was a wan, dark beauty, a sultry beauty. Discontent lurked in the corners of her full lips. He loved to look at her.

Frowning slightly, without lifting her eyes from the fire, she said:

“Don’t look at me like that.”

Then she smiled a strange smile, and resumed her silent contemplation of the flame.

His spoon rattled noisily against his cup. A little shiver ran over him. With regret and disappointment he perceived that he did not want to be unfaithful to his wife.

Diana extricated him from his confusion. “Will you bring me the cigarettes?” she called.

He hastened to her, immensely relieved. His violets in her corsage consoled and strengthened him. He sat down beside her, as it were under her wing.

But Mrs. Slocum wished to see the holographs. He led her reluctantly to the library, and side by side they studied the holographs of Lamb, Flaubert,

John Cave

Dostoyeffsky. In turning a page their hands touched. Her shoulder, firm and elastic, pressed against his. . . . But he hurried to the cabinet for another holograph.

As he was returning, he felt her gaze upon him, and lifting his eyes, he met her look of amused contempt.

Had she any right to scorn and ridicule him for his marital loyalty? Well, he had, perhaps, made an advance or two. And now, in his retreat, no doubt he did look rather small. But he had not realised the unspeakable falsity, the unspeakable cruelty, of the amours of the married.

"Suppose we go back to the drawing-room," he said in a sulky voice.

Diana and Slocum stood beside the fire, very busy with something; but on the others' appearance they drew suddenly back, and Slocum thrust his handkerchief up his cuff and sat down in an awkward attitude, with one arm placed across his waistcoat, like a broken arm in a sling.

Mrs. Slocum asked her husband to explain a Hoyas, and John, left alone with Diana, said:

"I lunched with Miles and Herkimer to-day."

"Did you?"

"They were awfully kind. Miles talked again of buying *The Press*."

"Did he?"

John Cave

"He asked a lot of questions. I told him all about old yawning Collier, and Gray the rubber stamp man, and Clayton with his brown frock coat and white sombrero. He said ——"

"Did he?"

Puzzled at the stupid interruption, he glanced at her. No, she had not been listening. Her lips parted, her eyes wide, her pose strained, she gazed across the room at the Slocums. His gaze followed hers, and he saw that the Slocums were furiously quarrelling in subdued tones. He smiled a tolerant smile.

"Listen, Di," he said. "Miles may send me over to *The Press's* sale. He ——"

But Diana had risen. She advanced slowly to meet the advancing Slocums.

"We must be going," said Slocum. He still held his arm across his waistcoat. It was his right arm, and he had to withdraw it to shake hands. John saw then a great stain upon his shirt-bosom.

"Good-night," said Diana, and she held out her hand to Mrs. Slocum.

But Mrs. Slocum with a smile and a toss of the head ignored her good-night and her proffered hand. She nodded to John and passed out. Slocum hurried after her, still imitating grotesquely a man with a broken arm.

John Cave

"What the deuce . . ." Utterly bewildered, he stared at Diana. "What the deuce . . ."

With a slight start he turned his back upon her, and, striding to the grate, he stood and gazed down into the flame.

The stain was a purple stain. It was about the height of Diana's violets. Her violets were crushed. . . . What a surprise!

He heard her stirring vaguely to and fro behind him.

"Good-night," she whispered.

Without moving he shouted suddenly:

"Get out of my sight!"

A long while after she was gone he stood in the silent room, his hands in his pockets, his back bowed, his legs wide apart, gazing down at the dying fire.

She, too, then. . . . What a surprise!

CHAPTER XIV

MRS. SLOCUM, telephoning to him the next morning at the office, asked him to take her out to luncheon.

They met in the restaurant with a feigned gaiety that soon gave way to silence and gloom. He ordered an expensive luncheon, and in taciturn embarrassment they bent over the *hors d'œuvres*. But they ate little. They were not at all like lovers. They were like two mourners with a little dead child upstairs.

But the champagne loosed their restraint, and John, refilling her glass, said with a shamefaced laugh:

"Last night was rather horrible, wasn't it?"

"Do you care?" said Mrs. Slocum.

"Yes. Do you?"

She nodded. "In a dog in the manger way."

"When I married," said he, "I believed that my passion for Diana would not die."

"We all believe that when we marry for love."

"But passion soon died," he resumed. "Marriage duped me. Yet I was glad I had married. Fool that I was, I would be loyal. And I saw in

John Cave

my new theory of marriage, with its renunciations and its self-denial, something noble and austere."

He pushed aside his untouched cutlet.

"I sometimes wondered," he faltered, "if Diana could accept that austere view. . . . Well, she couldn't, it appears. Good-bye, then, to loyalty. The divorce . . ."

"Good-bye to loyalty," said Mrs. Slocum; "but why a divorce?"

"But honour——"

"No woman can stain your honour," she interrupted. "Her actions touch no one's honour but her own."

The waiter announced that Mrs. Slocum's motor car had arrived, and she said carelessly, drawing down her veil:

"Come with me, if you like."

"Thank you."

And in her landaulet they were soon rushing furiously and smoothly along a white road, between two lines of bare trees that were bent in the wind at a uniform angle. Mrs. Slocum leaned back in her soft furs, and gazing straight before her, she said bitterly:

"Overlook it all. That is what I shall do."

"Why will you overlook it?"

She smiled sourly.

"Because marital fidelity is impossible," she said.

John Cave

"Fidelity of thought is impossible," he agreed.

"Impossible." She paused. Her dark eyes gazed at the western sky through a tracery of bare boughs, a sky of transparent gold shining through grey lace.

"When I married," she said, "I too believed in the immortality of passion. It died. It always dies. . . . But selfish passion was succeeded by unselfish affection. I love my husband now as I love my father or my brother. And so he loves me. Why, then, a divorce?"

He frowned. "But the deceit! You can't stand the deceit. Remember last night."

"Perhaps it was the deceit's failure that angered me last night," she answered slowly. "The discovery of these things gives one, of course, horrible pain. But if I don't discover them . . ."

"But the deceit," he repeated. "The life-long——"

She interrupted him impatiently.

"Passion is bestial," she said. "Yet we can't escape it. Then, when it seizes us, let us conceal its work. That isn't deceit, it is decency."

.

Reluctantly, because he thought she desired it, he took her hand, and peeling back the glove, he kissed the soft, warm palm. But she drew her hand

John Cave

away. To his surprise, to his relief, she would not let him kiss her mouth. And with some little irritation she disengaged her waist from his awkward arm.

CHAPTER XV

“DEAR JOHN,—I buy *The Dispatch* every day because you have articles in it and I enjoy them very much. Mr. Roberts told me you were married and he said you were very successful. I am so glad. I wonder if you would care to come and see me? There could be no harm in it—you will know why if you come. PRUDENCE.”

No harm in it: then she was ill? She gave a miserable address. Perhaps she wanted money again. Well, what if she did? She had not begrudged him money in his need.

The hansom hurried, and leaning forward, he mused upon life. . . . And from Prudence's life his thoughts turned to his own. . . . His relationship with Diana, calm and even affectionate, embraced nothing now but their material welfare: he worked his best; she, with her sincere and humble and unselfish interest, kept him up to his best work. Yet it was difficult to live always upon the surface of their relationship, though, to sustain himself, he often swore that woman really valued her chastity no more than man valued his. . . . Men from the

John Cave

beginning, on purely selfish grounds, had tried to hypnotise women into the belief that chastity before marriage, fidelity after it, were the supreme womanly virtues. All men preached that lie; all the arts and all the creeds, being masculine, preached it; and all preached it in vain. . . . He smiled grimly. Then he sighed. But why did he sigh? He sighed because he wished his wife had been like the Mahommedan ideal, the impossible creature, devoted body and soul, who in her husband's absence would neither laugh, nor listen to music, nor make her toilet, nor eat her favourite dishes. . . .

The hansom stopped before a mean house, and in answer to his ring the door was opened by a young woman with a cigarette in her mouth. She wore a loose pink gown. Her short hair, as yellow and dry as straw, curled over her head in tight kinks. Her face was daubed with rouge and powder, and when she smiled a gold front tooth shot, like a little sun, bright rays into his eyes.

"Hello, dear," she said.

"Good morning," he answered stiffly. "Does Miss Pru ——"

"Oh, excuse me. Are you Mr. Cave?"

He nodded, and she led him down a bare hall and through a bare parlour. The house seemed quite unfurnished. Not a rug, not a picture, not a seat,

John Cave

was to be seen. But the dining-room boasted a table and a half-dozen deal chairs, and she left him there with three girls.

"Just wait here a minute, Mr. Cave."

The three girls regarded him calmly. In loose gowns, one of yellow, one of red, one of green, they leaned their elbows on the table, amid a litter of egg-stained breakfast dishes, smoking cigarettes and sipping coffee from enormous cups.

"Take a seat," said the girl in red. She smiled languidly, then she yawned. "I feel rotten this morning," she murmured.

"My head aches fit to split," the girl in yellow sighed.

"If we had stopped," whined the girl in green, "when I said to . . ."

Crossing her legs and clasping her ankle with nicotine-stained fingers, the girl in red struck a match on the sole of her slipper and lighted a Virginia cigarette that smelt like burning hay.

"Maybe," she said, "Mr. Cave will treat."

They all turned to him with polite, inquiring smiles.

"Yes, I'll gladly treat," said he, and he laid a dollar on the table. "Tell me, is Prudence ill?" he asked.

"Ill? Dying!"

"Nonsense!"

John Cave

"Wait till you see her."

And they were shaking their heads lugubriously over Prudence when the girl in pink returned.

"Now, sir, if you're ready."

"Has Prudence a physician?" he asked, as they ascended the steep, dark stairway.

"Doc Capp drops in now and then. But he says there is no hope."

"I suppose she's hard up?"

"Of course. She can't walk out more than once a week, if that."

"'Walk out'? I don't quite grasp ——"

Then, in a flash, he did grasp, and the ugly phrase gave him a new and sombre picture of his friend. He frowned. . . .

"She was arrested last month."

They reached the door, and his guide withdrew in silence. He stood a moment on the threshold.

Prudence, propped with pillows, sat in the wide bed in a dream. Her dark hair lay in a thick rope on her white gown. Though thin and pale beyond belief, the freshness and the loveliness of youth still, like a faint perfume, clung to her, and there was no change in the beautiful eyes. On his appearance she started, she flushed, and, as she extended her thin hands, her air had never been gayer, more reckless, more charming.

"Dear old girl," he said.

John Cave

Murmuring gentle little phrases of welcome, Prudence drew her hands slowly away.

"Are you glad to see me?" she asked.

"Am I glad to see you! Do you think I have no memory?"

She laughed softly.

"What good times we used to have," she said.

"Do you remember the night we first met? Do you remember our first ride together in the hansom?"

"Do I remember!"

"You kissed me in the hansom," she resumed, gazing out of the window dreamily.

Her pallid face was like a wedge between the heavy masses of her unbound hair. The ghost of a smile made her lips tremble. He regarded her in silence a long time. . . . From the lowered lids tears welled; they hung glistening in the long lashes.

And suddenly she bowed her forehead on her knees and wept. Her hair fell forward. Under it her voice had a muffled sound.

"Oh," she moaned, "why have I spoiled my life? . . . Must I die? . . . I am afraid of death."

"You are not going to die," he said.

"I lie awake at night," she whispered. "I can't sleep for fear."

"Well, that is all over now," said he. "I'll send

John Cave

a physician here at once. And in the mountains you'll soon grow strong again."

She leaned back on the pillows, shaking her head incredulously.

The door opened, and a fat, elderly man appeared. He tiptoed over to Prudence and put some money in her hand.

"Two and a half was all they'd give on it," he said. "I bought you a squab. It's cooking now downstairs."

He seated himself in a rocking-chair, took a pipe from his patched coat, and began to smoke and rock vigorously.

"I think I remember you," said John.

He nodded. "Times have changed for the worse with me," he said. "With her, too." And he pointed his pipestem at the young girl.

"Oh, she will soon be all right now," John cried heartily. "She is going to the mountains."

"Is she?" said the other. He frowned, rocked to and fro, and puffed hard at his pipe. "That's good," he said, in a dismal voice.

The girl in pink returned, bringing an odour of whisky with her, and when John took leave of Prudence, the fat man followed him forth.

"We might have a drink, Mr. Cave," he said, as they descended noisily the uncarpeted stairs. "I'll walk as far as the corner with you."

John Cave

"Very well."

"I guess you heard about my trouble," he went on. "I pretended to Prudence I was rich. I had to—to hold her. She never cared anything for me. Fat men have no success with women."

"Haven't they?"

"Oh, no. So, to hold her, I pretended I was rich. I gave her more in a week than I earned in a month. When the smash came, they let me off on account of my thirty-four years' service and the wife and boy. Still, my house and life insurance policy partly paid——"

He broke off, thrust his head in at the dining-room door, and smiled and shook his red and dirty forefinger roguishly at the three young women seated, with a flask of whisky, at the disordered table.

"Well, go on," said John.

"Where was I?"

"About your family."

"Oh, they're all right now. The boy has a fine job, he brings his pay home regular. I hear he wants to marry, but of course, as long as his mother lives . . ."

John nodded. "And what are you doing?" he asked.

"There's some bar-rooms I look after."

"You are not a bartender, are you?"

John Cave

“Oh, no. I swab out four bars at closing time. It’s mean, wet work, and nasty hours. But I don’t complain.”

The fat man lingered on the doorstep. There was in his demeanour a gaiety that he tried in vain to hide.

“Well, are you coming?” said John impatiently.

He hesitated. “About that drink — some other time will do, won’t it? You see, I want to keep the girls in order in the dining-room.”

Prudence that evening set out with a nurse for the mountains of New Hampshire.

CHAPTER XVI

IN Miles's behalf he had bought at auction that morning the moribund *Press* for six hundred thousand dollars; and now, as editor-in-chief, he entered the office from which he had been ejected, penniless and drunken, with kicks and curses.

To his dismay the room was crowded. Before that mass of men he halted in the doorway with a frown. But a murmur of welcome arose, and Clayton, advancing in a purple frock coat, led him to a central desk.

Pale and grave, he looked about him. Here and there a familiar face gazed anxiously into his. He saw Gray's face, solemn, fat, white; Collier's, a little mocking, under its crest of stiff hair; Clayton's, fixed in a nervous smile; and haggard and hopeless were the aged faces of the staff of editors who wrote *The Press's* interminable leaders upon steel rails and bimetallism.

In that moment, the climax of his career, with his huge salary, his youth, his imposing office, his absolute power over all these men who had kicked and cursed him, John Cave felt neither triumphant, nor kindly, nor revengeful. He felt only afraid.

John Cave

He felt only afraid of failure in his difficult task of restoring the moribund old *Press* to vigorous youth.

The business manager swaggered forward, made a gay speech full of such terms as "your auspicious return," "our heartfelt delight" and "sure success," then handed him a bouquet of red roses, the gift of the staff.

All clapped and cheered. He saw Collier, Gray, Clayton, even old man Clayton, clapping and cheering. The applause died, and he began:

"Thank you for these roses. Perhaps you remember my departure from *The Press*. There were no roses then."

They exchanged shocked looks, but here and there he saw a repressed smile, and Lawson gave a loud laugh that was suddenly hushed.

"There were no roses," he repeated, "when you kicked me out, a drunken wreck. But what made me a drunken wreck? Your hatred. And why did you hate me? Because I criticised your work frankly and freely.

"Hereafter I shall criticise your work more frankly and freely than ever. But please don't hate me for it. Be grateful to me for it. It will do you good.

"Hatreds, friendships, count here no more. Nothing counts here now but work. By your

John Cave

work alone you will stand or fall. How relieved you look. Yet I am afraid some of you will fall."

He stopped. Without applause, without a smile, without a whisper, they withdrew. But he asked the two Claytons and Collier to remain, and the four men seated themselves about a desk in a corner of the big room. Turning to the editor-in-chief, he said:

"You know, Mr. Clayton, I am to take your place."

The old man's face fell. "Then I'm to go?"

"Yes."

"My lifelong devotion ——"

"—counts for nothing." And John shook his head and smiled.

His thirty years of office old man Clayton had used for his own benefit. He had worked hard to obtain all the free privileges and pleasures that are an American editor's due, and, thanks to his un-sleeping greed, few of these privileges and pleasures had escaped him. He had a free box at every theatre, free use of all telegraph, telephone and express services, free passage on any railroad; and insatiably for thirty years he had gobbled up the best of the free excursions that are thrust by the dozen upon newspapers, speeding, with a party of capitalists or politicians, now to Florida, now to the Yellowstone, now to California, in a luxurious

John Cave

private train that rang with hoarse song and the clear and hollow note of champagne corks. . . . Yet in the retrospect they seemed to the old man, those thirty swift years, years of incessant and stupendous toil, and in senile rage he exploded feebly:

"But it is disgraceful, after a lifetime of service, to discharge me now."

"Mr. Miles asks you to accept a gift of six months' salary."

"Oh, he does, does he?"

"Why, that's splendid, father," cried young Clayton, with urgent nods and winks.

"I take your terms," said the old man hastily, and he rose and hobbled away to pack up the dream book, the almanac, the grammar, all the accumulation of thirty years.

John turned to the son.

"Our leaders are to come from New York, Bert," he said. "Herkimer's leaders, you know, appear in all the Miles papers. So of course *The Press* leader writers must go. Do you mind telling them?"

"No, I don't mind," Clayton faltered.

"Miles gives each of the old fellows three months' pay."

"They'll need it," said Clayton, "before they find work again."

John Cave

"And about your own post. It conflicts with mine, and ——"

Clayton flung out his arms in a gesture of despair, and John interjected hastily:

"But it's all right. What salary are you getting?"

"Seventy-five dollars."

"It is none too much. You turn out a pretty good story. Suppose you go back on the street again — be our star reporter?"

"Well, I'll do my best," said Clayton. And he set his huge sombrero on his small, bony head, and in his purple frock coat and brown boots, diffusing a faint odour of musk, he departed to discharge the six aged leader writers.

Collier, as soon as he was left alone with John, said with a harsh, mocking laugh:

"Well, am I to go?"

"It depends on yourself. There is no love lost between us, Coll, but I shall treat you justly."

Collier's prominent blue eyes became bright and hard.

"Now, see here, Cave," he said in his high, whining voice, "you know you deserved all you got from me, and ——"

"Oh, don't bring that up, for heaven's sake."

Collier sneered, with an air of cold conviction:

John Cave

"You won't last here."

"Why not?"

"There's no stability in you."

Very red, John mused a moment with knitted brows. Then he looked up and smiled.

"Well, while I do last, this is what I expect of you," he said calmly. "You are to come to the office every morning at ten o'clock, and at one, when your reporters arrive, their assignments are all to be ready for them. Ready for them — you understand? And they must be good assignments, too — not scandalous — but good."

"What do you mean by good?"

He explained what he meant by good at great length.

"And by the way," he concluded, "see that Gray, with his 'breathing spots' and his 'historic olds,' handles no more copy. Is Gray interested in any of your departments?"

"Real estate."

"Well, let him do real estate, then."

Thus began the rejuvenation of *The Press*. John read all the American papers, he wrote to the authors of all such stories as he liked, and continually, as *Press* men were discharged, he brought on these other men to take their places.

With the winter's ending *The Press* became the

John Cave

paper he had desired to make it, a paper interesting and accurate from end to end, a paper written from end to end in English simple and graceful.

At the same time its circulation continued to fall. At the same time, too, he found it impossible to maintain a high tone in its columns, for as sure as, out of delicacy, he refrained from interviewing respondents, co-respondents and suchlike persons, the most remarkable interviews appeared the next morning in every other paper in town, and Herkimer asked mildly over the long-distance telephone why *The Press* had missed the story.

CHAPTER XVII

"WHOM did you take to supper at the Westminster last night?"

He turned away with a frown. "Oh, leave my affairs alone."

"Shirley Brooke saw you."

"What do I care who saw me?"

She broke into high, shrill laughter. "Don't humiliate me too deeply!" she cried.

"'Humiliate' you! You began it! It is all your fault, you——"

And he rushed upon her with clenched fists. He towered over her, his fists clenched above her head. But she, motionless in her pale gown, the diamonds flickering on her white, tumultuous bosom, smiled at his violence with superb scorn. So he left the room.

In the library he began a letter to Prudence. Prudence, after regaining much of her strength amid the sunlit snows of the New Hampshire mountains, had returned to opium again, and now, they told him, she was dying. And the dying girl wished to see him, but he must write and tell her that he could not come.

John Cave

A hard letter to write. He finished a page, and in the blotting of it his mind wandered, and he began to brood on his unhappy marriage.

Yet, since passion was ephemeral as a rose, since affection endured like iron, he believed his marriage to be in every respect right. But why did they find it so difficult then to live up to such a marriage? Were their natures of too low a type?

No: the whole trouble seemed to be that they did not succeed in hiding from one another their flirtations.

But they were continually spying on one another. Therefore their flirtations were impossible to hide.

He wished Diana had been true to him. Then he would have been true to her. They would have grown old together. And as their future dwindled to nothing but two waiting graves, they would have had the future of their children to absorb them, to make them forget age and death, and they would have been almost as happy in their children's future as in the magical return of their own youth. He wished they had been true to one another, their loyalty the one sure thing in a world ugly and false.

Could they forget the past and start their married life afresh? No; impossible. Nothing can be started afresh.

He looked up, and some sulphur-coloured roses

John Cave

in a blue bowl reminded him, by their beauty, of the dancing girl with whom he had supped last night. He smiled.

Diana, after all, had unlocked for them a very beautiful garden. She had freed them from the hideous prison, the cold, grey prison, of marital fidelity. And now without deceit, whilst enjoying the stimulus of their affection to the full, they could enjoy besides all those passions which are born, like flowers, continually in the heart. . . . Yes, a beautiful, honourable life was theirs —

But he started at the sound of a man's voice in the drawing-room, and, very pale all of a sudden, he tiptoed to the drawing-room door to listen.

"We'll go at once," the voice said.

In terror lest he be caught eavesdropping, he darted back to the library with long, light, silent leaps. He left the door open on a crack. Then he stood behind it, pinching his mouth with thumb and forefinger, his head cocked on one side, very still, listening.

Whether the voice was Slocum's or Brooke's he could not tell. He rather thought it was Brooke's. Diana was dining at her aunt's, and the young man had no doubt been sent to fetch her. "We'll go at once," he said, meaning they would go at once to Mrs. Scarlett's.

At the same time, as he listened there intently,

John Cave

clasping and unclasping his mouth with tremulous fingers, he felt faint with the premonition of some great calamity.

The voices in the drawing-room flowed on in monotonous murmurings. Suddenly Diana cried, "I will!" Then a door opened, her silk skirts swished in the hall, she entered her room, for a long time she made a great clatter there. What could she be about?

At last she came forth again. She rejoined the man. The lift bell tinkled. They were descending.

He turned off the light, and, though safe enough from detection in the darkness, he knelt before the window and peeped out very cautiously, like a sentinel in a rain of bullets.

A white motor car stood before the hotel. Diana, wrapped in furs, entered it with Brooke. An attendant gave the chauffeur a kit-bag. A kit-bag . . . that was odd. The car sped away.

He turned on the light again. He stood, with bowed head, in the middle of the floor, continually pinching and releasing his lips with thumb and forefinger in quick, regular, unconscious motion. A kit-bag? Very odd.

A maid handed him upon a silver tray a note wherein Diana had scrawled:

John Cave

"I am going away with Shirley Brooke. You will never see me again. Good-bye, John Cave."

He sank into an arm-chair in a limp posture and rang at once for a bottle of whisky and some soda-water. It was amazing how little he cared. He cared not at all, either one way or the other.

But he felt extraordinarily limp . . . limp, weak . . . even a little faint and sickish . . . as though by some terrible but painless operation his entire backbone had just been removed. . . .

CHAPTER XVIII

"How do you feel this morning?"

"Fine," whispered Prudence, smiling. But tears, the ready tears of extreme weakness, welled into her clear eyes, and to restrain them she blinked rapidly.

He sat beside her, and they gazed forth at the blue lake, the green mountains, and the sky's pure and brilliant dome wherein, like floating specks, birds circled.

A boat rounded the point, a boat almost as wide as it was long. A thin old fellow rowed with tremendous vigour, but the boat was too heavy to be forced out of its snail's pace. A fat, elderly man sat with crossed legs in an arm-chair in the stern, reading a newspaper and smoking a cigar.

John descended to the cottage landing as the fat man disembarked with two enormous salmon.

"You had good luck?"

Jake, beside himself with excitement, shouted from the boat:

"I guess we had! There's no fishin' like spring fishin'. B'gorry, look here!"

John Cave

The bottom of the boat was heaped with great, silvery salmon, a dozen at least, as big as babies.

"Have a drink on the head of it." The fat man took a bottle from his pocket.

"No, thank yee," said Jake. And he pushed off and rowed away with vigorous strokes. But suddenly he dropped his oars, put to each side of his mouth a brown, lean hand, and shouted:

"Tell the young lady 'twas the best day's fishin' o' forty-nine years! B'gorry, I guess 'twas the best fishin' ever been done!"

The fat man took the bottle from his mouth to shout back condescendingly:

"All right, Jake."

Then, as it was mail time, he and John set off together for the post-office.

"How is she, sir?"

"About the same."

They trudged on in silence. Now and then the fat man sighed.

"You don't mind my being here, sir?"

"No, of course not."

"Pearl lent me the money to come with."

"Pearl?"

"I guess you don't remember her. The girl in the red dress."

"No."

"I only intended to spend the day. It was kind

John Cave

of you to ask me to stay. I am making myself useful, chopping wood and — er — so on."

"Oh, that's all right."

Under a birch they drank again from the bottle.

"Shouldn't we inform Prudence's people?"

John asked.

"I have already written to her mother."

"Who are her people?"

"They come from New Jersey . . . one of those New Jersey villages . . . little grey wooden houses, choked with sand, lost in the pines. Her father died last year of delirium tremens. Her mother's a still worse lot."

"Prudence was very beautiful," John mused.

"And the mother knew it. Mr. Cave, she put the girl on the stage at thirteen. Kauffman was the first to take her up. He wanted to marry her. Kauffman left her at his death those Persian rugs and old carved chests. He'd have left her his money if he had had any."

"Fond of her, eh?"

"Who wasn't fond of her? She could have married well. But she was reckless . . . somehow honourable . . . but very reckless. . . . Still, if it hadn't been for the opium . . ."

After luncheon the fat man ostentatiously fell to woodchopping in the wild garden behind the cottage, while John went up to Prudence again.

John Cave

"Still on the mend?"

She smiled.

"And do you like it here at Sunapee?"

"I love it," she whispered.

"When you get well ——"

Her eyes dropped, and she frowned and shook her head.

"What is the matter?"

Still with lowered lids she whispered bitterly:

"When I get well!"

He feigned bewilderment. "Of course: when you get well."

She looked up at him piteously. Her eyes were full of tears. And with a piteous smile she breathed:

"I heard what the doctor told you."

Then she turned to the wall and hid her face in the pillows. No sound came from her. He saw her shoulder quiver a little.

She knew she was going to die. It horrified him to discover that. He repeated mechanically:

"You are mistaken. I'll prove you are mistaken."

Suddenly Prudence sat erect. Her tense hands clasped her cheeks. Her face, red and distorted, streamed with tears. He could hardly bear the torture in her appealing eyes.

"Oh, why must I die?" The whisper had the

John Cave

intensity of a shriek. "Don't you think it's cruel? I'm only a girl. Don't you think it's cruel?"

The streaming eyes peered into his. Had he, they asked him, any help to give? But he could only repeat, "You are not dying; it is a mistake." And he saw despair deepen in her eyes. No, he had no help to give. Exhausted, she turned to the wall again.

"Excuse me," she breathed.

How humble, how contrite and resigned, the bowed back now looked. He clasped the thin hand upon the coverlet. He felt her fingers' gentle pressure. . . .

The nurse entered, and thinking her patient asleep, signed for him to withdraw.

He descended to the hall. From the hall's south windows he saw the fat man chopping wood. From the north window he saw the boats of half a dozen absorbed anglers bobbing at anchor above Trout Hole. He paced to and fro.

Poor Prudence! He heard again her plaint: "Don't you think it's cruel? I'm only a girl. Don't you think it's cruel?"

But abandoning Prudence, his thoughts leaped towards Diana.

She had left him. Her support withdrawn, he would work no more.

And a storm of rage and hatred shook him, in

John Cave

its clutch he longed for the death of his faithless wife, but as quickly as it had come the storm passed.

He had found it impossible to face Collier, Clayton and Gray, but why had he fled without a word? Nobody knew where he was. What did they think? Herkimer, perhaps, understood, but to desert the helm without a word was the kind of thing a strong soul like Herkimer could never forgive.

But all that was nothing beside the loss of Diana.

Her desertion caused him intolerable pain. It seemed altogether unnatural, like a mother's desertion of her child. She knew how much he needed her.

He loved her more than he had ever loved anyone, more than his father, more than his mother. Perhaps, if he had been a little wiser, a little kinder, their horrible shipwreck might have been averted. But they were both so young, so inexperienced! If only someone could have told them in time what they now knew too late! Alas, too late!

He made a gesture of despair, and to escape his thoughts, he summoned the fat man to a game of cards.

The days passed like strange dreams. He played cards, fished, took long walks over the mountains, and every night in the hall, at a little

John Cave

table before a fire of birch logs in the granite chimney, he smoked and drank with the fat man. He argued across the table. It grew very late. Sometimes the nurse, appearing magically at his elbow, reminded him that Prudence slept. Then, abashed, he drank and smoked in silence.

A strange time. He drank as he had never done, yet he slept well, his appetite was good, he even took on weight. And thanks to the alcohol, all his troubles, the loss of Diana, the wreck of his career, poor Prudence's approaching death, seemed as unreal as the thin grey wraiths of dreams. . . .

Prudence, calm in her white bed, grew always weaker. Only John's presence excited her. Therefore his visits became few and brief. For each of his visits the toilet of the dying girl was made with extreme care.

"Have I been very wicked?" she asked one morning.

"You wicked!"

Her eyes flamed. A deep flush appeared on each cheek bone. She breathed convulsively.

"I have."

"No, no."

With his voice, with his smile, he tried to soothe her; but her agitation increased. Trembling, breathing stormily, she panted:

"The Bible says — it says ——"

John Cave

Then she choked, and, as she motioned distractingly for him to go, blood gushed from her mouth and streamed like bright red ribbons down her white gown. She glanced in despair at the brilliant disorder of those widening streaks, and with both hands she waved him from the room, choking, gasping:

"Oh, go! Won't you please go?"

The doctor was summoned in haste. He spent the day at her bedside. John and the fat man smoked and read in silence in the hall.

At sunset the doctor came and leaned against the chimneypiece. "You may ascend, gentlemen." There was in his face the abashed look which death creates.

The fat man rose. He knocked his pipe noisily against the andiron. Then he went to the window and stood looking out.

John inhaled and blew forth quickly, one after another, huge clouds of smoke.

"Is it the end?" he asked.

"A question of minutes."

He mounted the stairs. The fat man followed him. As they entered the room, the eyelids of the dying girl fluttered, but whether she saw them or not it was impossible to say.

She was propped high with pillows. The contour of her neck and shoulders was pure and youth-

John Cave

ful. The coverlet moulded the long lines of the slender limbs. Between the dark, luxuriant masses of her hair, the face, pale, with closed eyes, was like a face hewn in marble. Only the hands, laid upon her breast, moved; the thin fingers plucked at the coverlet steadily.

There was something in that face which abased and horrified the two men. In silence, side by side, they stood at the foot of the bed. The hands twitched on. The nurse, with a movement tender and caressing, leaned over and wiped the wet brow.

Suddenly Prudence gave a faint gasp. Her eyes, full of care and trouble, opened for an instant. Then her eyelids fell, she sank a little lower on the pillow, her hands ceased their movement.

CHAPTER XIX

THE nocturnal silence was profound. The house slept, the world slept. Prudence, straight and slim in her white bed, slept best of all.

John Cave alone was wakeful. He sat in the dark, his elbows on his knees, his face in his hands, frowning into the fire.

For the first time he saw the secret of his life clearly. He was of the morass, to the morass he must always return. . . .

Yet his aspiring soul loved the sunlit heights. It loathed the pollution of the morass. . . . Alas, all loved the heights down there.

From the hearth a wave of light flowed over him, surged up the wall, and receded silently into the hearth again.

He knew the secret of happiness. Work was the secret. All else deceived, or failed, or perished. Friends deceived, drugs failed, passion perished. But work remained, kind and fair and faithful to the end. And the more ardently and devotedly man gave himself to work, the more ardour and devotion work gave back, the richer and finer were the rewards that she extended with both hands.

John Cave

He knew the secret of happiness, but he also knew the secret of his life. He, made for the morass, could not accept the austere happiness of a life of work. He wanted to, but he could not — could not any more than a legless man, by wanting to, could run.

He saw the end of his life — a succession of struggles, each ending in defeat, the struggles growing rarer and the defeats more hopeless as time passed, till finally he lay quiet in the morass, an old, grey thing that only suffered.

He heard upstairs the sound of cautious, clumsy footsteps. The fat man, awake again, had sought once more the bedside of the beautiful dead girl. After a long silence the heavy footsteps withdrew. . . .

Had he the courage to save himself from those long years of ignominy? . . . Perhaps . . .

He lit the lamp. He wrote a cheque and addressed it to the fat man — “For funeral expenses etc.” Then he uncorked a fresh bottle of whisky, put it under his arm, extinguished the lamp, and went out on tiptoe.

The night was still and very starry; there was no moon. He stood a moment on the edge of the landing. The black water was deep there. One step down, and all would be over.

And with a strange smile he imagined himself

John Cave

taking that terrible step down. . . . A splash would sound loud in the silence. He would gasp sharply as the cold water engulfed him. The struggle would begin.

Would it last long? A minute or two, perhaps, not more. . . . But how long would it seem to last?

He would try to keep quite still, for, if he threshed about with legs and arms, he would come to the surface, breathe, prolong the struggle. . . . Yes, he would keep quite still in those black depths, and with closed mouth he would hold his breath as long as he could. There would be no pain so long as he held his breath. But to hold the breath till one suffocates is impossible. Swinging to and fro, fists clenched, limbs rigid, lips compressed, he would find it more and more difficult to keep from breathing. His head, despite the cold water in which it was immersed, would swell and burn. And when, nearly bursting, he should open his mouth at last and take a deep breath of water instead of air — Christ, what horrible pain, what unimaginable agony, as all that water rushed down, down through mouth and nostrils, into his lungs! . . .

He could not stand the thought. He wrung his hands. He walked up and down the landing with quick strides.

A pistol shot, a dose of poison, a leap from a

John Cave

precipice? No, those methods were no easier. It was his cowardice alone that suggested them.

But he knew he would struggle.

He stopped short in his distracted walk and saw himself clearly in the black water, under the cold stars, floundering, amid foam and gurgles, like some monstrous fish.

He must drink. Whisky, his old enemy, would be a good friend to him in the end. He would die in a stupor like those wherein surgical operations are performed.

He set out along the lake's rough shore. In the darkness he clambered with marvelous ease over granite boulders, across steeps slippery with moss. Every little while he paused and drank. He purposed at last, stupefied, to drop like a stone into the water. . . .

He talked aloud, as the bottle emptied, with frantic gestures. . . .

The lake's black surface glimmered faintly here and there. The mountains uprose, mysterious and grand, into the sky. And with their frosty scintillations, their cold glitter, their palpitant and icy light, the innumerable stars resembled a host of very old men chuckling together over that little, black figure which now clambered on hands and knees up granite rocks, now erected itself on some small eminence and gesticulated violently towards

John Cave

the heavens with tiny arms, now broke the night's profound and august silence with shrill, thin clamour. . . .

.

Jake, hastening at sunrise towards the spring, stumbled over a leg that protruded from a clump of reeds. The young man lay amid dank growths in a marsh, the empty bottle at his side, prone in the alcoholic stupor of another failure.

Jake regarded him with astonishment, disgust, pity.

Then the hale old fisherman, taking John Cave vigorously by the shoulders, awoke again that soul too timid ever to destroy itself, and too weak ever to uplift from the morass its weight of flesh in sustained flight.

“John Cave.”

“An author of genius—there is really no other word for it. . . . A story of vivid and palpitating human interest. . . . One of the most remarkable first novels we have ever read.”—*Daily Graphic*.

“A strong novel, a powerful story, a most interesting and fascinating book.”—*Daily Mail*.

“The book is altogether a remarkable one.”—*Outlook*.

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Barbara Gwynne
(LIFE)

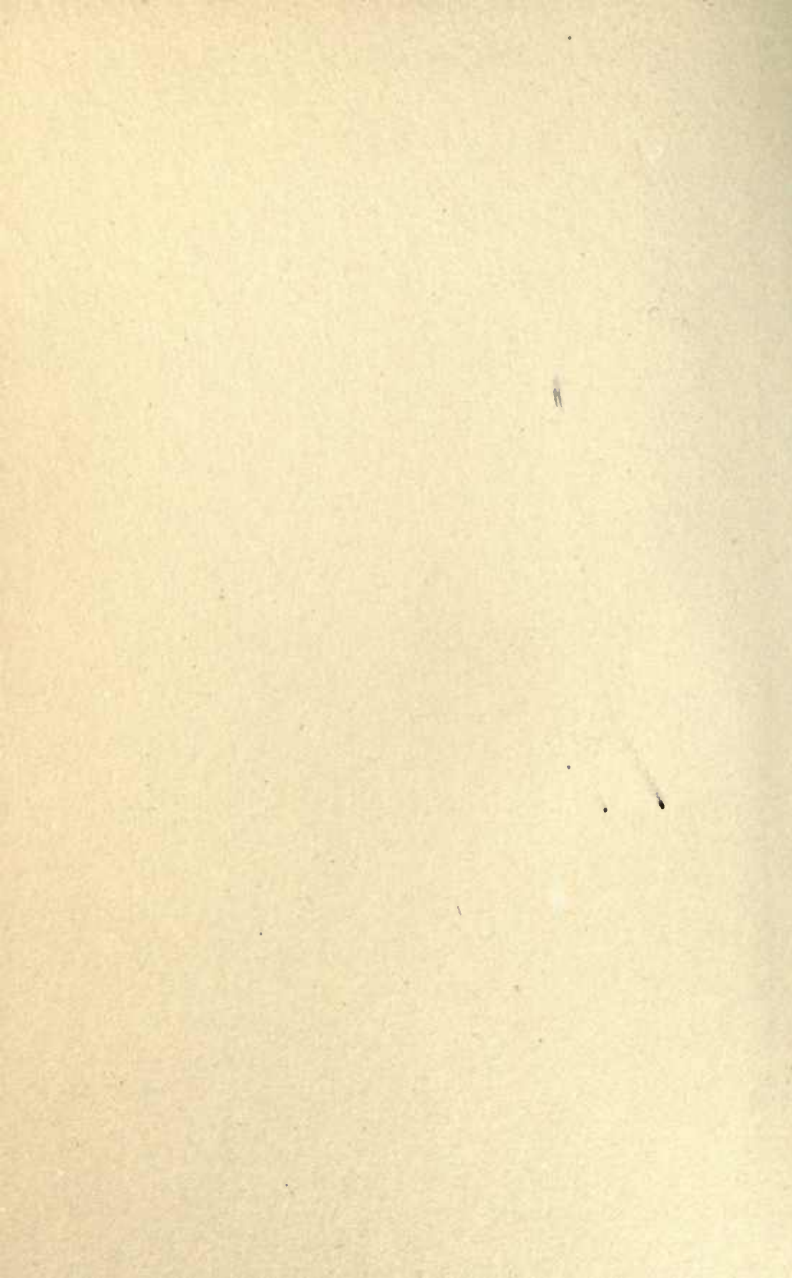
John Cave

By

W. B. TRITES

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